



Running for fun, elected for real

A genre based analysis of two comedians' humorous election campaigns

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PhD Dissertation

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Running for fun, elected for real

A genre based analysis of two comedians'
humorous election campaigns

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Preface: overview of dissertation and acknowledgements

In 1994, a Danish comedian was elected Member of Parliament in Denmark promising better weather and free beer. In 2010, an Icelandic comedian was elected Mayor of Reykjavík promising more polar bears at the zoo—and to break all promises he made during his election campaign. The same year, a Brazilian comedian and clown, Tiririca, was elected to Congress promising to help all Brazilian families, especially his own. He was furthermore re-elected in 2014, and also this year a German satirist and his political party, “Die PARTEI” (*The PARTY*), were elected to the European Parliament pledging, among other things, to build a wall around Switzerland.

Such examples reflect clowns, comedians, and satirists who extraordinarily won political elections through campaigns that rested on humor.¹ This dissertation explores two such cases and how they employed humor in their election campaigns leading to their spectacular wins. More specifically, it explores the case of Danish comedian Jacob Haugaard, who became Member of Parliament from 1994 to 1998, and Icelandic comedian Jón Gnarr, who became Mayor of Reykjavík from 2010 to 2014.

The purpose of the dissertation is to examine how the comedians utilize humor as a rhetorical strategy to violate the generic conventions and function of an election campaign—and how they nevertheless end up accomplishing the social action of an election campaign: winning the election.

The dissertation begins with an outline of its purpose, case selection and case material, and the theoretical approach applied in the analyses. The introductory chapter moreover offers a discussion of the election campaign as genre and explores the variety of genres (or genre sets) the election campaign embodies. Understanding the election campaign as the overall genre and the range of genres it commonly comprises may help us better understand how the comedians take up the genre and the functions they perform.

¹ In this dissertation, humor is defined as the overarching category that encompasses all types of communication intended to raise laughter or amuse. Humor, moreover, is understood as an umbrella term for all phenomena, genres, or concepts associated with it, for example, the comic, the funny, farce, irony, mockery, etc. More specifically, I delimit the type of humorous communication examined in this dissertation as *political humor*. That is, humor referring to something political or used in a political context. I elaborate on this understanding of humor in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical basis of the project: humor. Since the comedians' election campaigns rely on humor and thus suggest the rhetorical impact of humor, the chapter overall explores what humor is and the rhetorical functions it may serve as a persuasive means when employed in the context of a political election campaign. The chapter initially expands on the definition of humor applied in this dissertation and proceeds to define and discuss political humor as genre—another central genre to this dissertation. It continues to introduce the relevant context for understanding the case studies, namely the blending of humor and politics, and the development of contemporary political communication. Next, the chapter examines the three major theories of humor: the superiority theory, the incongruity theory, and the relief theory. Essential ideas and notions with respect to the case studies are developed further in the last sections that center on different aspects of the use of humor as a rhetorical strategy. As the comedians' genre violations primarily manifest in the form of irony, parody, and satire operational definitions of these notions are offered in the concluding section.

Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 are the case studies. These are structured similarly and begin with an introduction to the comedians' backgrounds, the political parties that they either create or become engaged in, and the historical, cultural, and political context of their elections. The chapters proceed to describe the comedians' election campaigns, the polls and results, and examine the election genres they take up. The general purpose of the analytical work is to uncover the ways in which the comedians distort these genres through use of humor and the social functions they perform, so that we may come to a better understanding of how this may have impacted their electoral success.

Overall, the case studies reveal that even though the comedians employ humor strategically in their campaigns, they do not employ it for the purpose of the election genre. This key finding is discussed in Chapter 5. It recapitulates and compares the case studies and some of the most significant factors with respect to the comedians' use of humor that likely affected their wins. These factors principally are associated with the comedians' election promises and creation of parodic political personas. Moreover, the chapter considers the extent to which the case studies and applied theory help explain the comedians' success relative to how they employed humor in their campaigns. That is, between what is generally assumed to achieve persuasive success and what the comedians actually do.

Chapter 6 concludes the dissertation. It summarizes the main findings of the case studies relative to the purpose of the dissertation. Overall, it concludes that even though the comedians deliberately sabotage their candidacies through their parodic election campaigns, they likely succeeded at echoing the frustrations and values of voters relative to politics, thereby winning their support. Thus, by fulfilling the social function of political humor, the comedians in effect fulfill the social function of an election campaign too.

Before proceeding with the dissertation I wish to briefly, though emphatically, thank the many great people who have stood by me throughout the time this project has been underway.

Foremost, I want to thank my supervisor, Sune Auken. Without Sune, this dissertation would not have existed. “Fremdrift, Energi, Velvære” (“Progress, Energy, Wellbeing”) have been his and our mantra during the intense writing process, and Sune has been an amazing support in all three aspects. In my life, I have met only few people as generous, kind, enthusiastic, inspirational, humorous, and fast thinking as Sune—and I feel immensely proud and privileged to have worked with him on this dissertation.

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“It can’t get any worse—vote Tiririca”

- Tiririca, 2010, candidate for the Brazilian general elections.

“Finally a President Who Can't Get the Maid Pregnant”

- Roseanne Barr, 2012, candidate for President of the United States of America.

“Making a Better Tomorrow, Tomorrow”

- Stephen Colbert, 2012, candidate for ‘President of the United States of South Carolina.’

“Something about nurses (people like nurses)”

- Al Murray, 2015, candidate for the UK general elections.

1. Introduction: purpose, cases, and theoretical approach

When Danish comedian Jacob Haugaard was elected Member of the Danish Parliament in 1994, he referred to his election as “one of the greatest practical jokes ever made in Denmark” (Spærhage Hansen 2011). There was “no point to [his] election program,” Haugaard explains in an interview (Uhrbrandt 1995), and thus no point to his candidacy. Similarly, when Icelandic comedian Jón Gnarr ran for city council in Reykjavík in 2010, he initially “thought he was running for prime minister,” as his campaign manager reveals (Pendakis 2013). Thus, the comedians ran election campaigns for a position they did not really want—at least not initially. Their actions thereby contradict the generic purpose of an election campaign, namely to get elected. Voting for a comedian with no political experience or knowledge, in turn, hardly seems like the ideal choice of candidate for a position of considerable responsibility. Adding to this, neither comedian had an actual, viable political program, and both presented empty or impossible promises. Yet, both comedians were elected based on campaigns that principally relied on humor.

The overall purpose of the dissertation therefore is to uncover the comedians’ election campaigns in depth so that we may come to a better understanding of how the comedians employed humor in their campaigns and how this use may have affected their wins. Moreover, this dissertation explores how the comedians take up the election campaign, how they distort its generic conventions and purpose, and how they nevertheless win through such genre violations.

Based on the analytical work, this dissertation concludes that although the comedians employ humor strategically in their campaigns, they do not employ it to accomplish the social action of an election campaign: to win the election. The comedians primarily use humor for the purpose of laughter, entertainment, and criticism of established politicians or conventions in politics. Thus, they perform the social function of political humor: to point out incongruities, expose moral vices, and undermine political authorities. Although the comedians deliberately sabotage their candidacies, voters nevertheless support them. This suggests that the comedians were successful at entertaining and mirroring the opinions and values of voters, thereby providing comic relief through their parodic election campaigns. By accomplishing the social action of political humor, the comedians in effect accomplish the social action of an election

campaign too. The case studies therefore reveal insights into how humor may be utilized as a rhetorical strategy in election campaigns—even though it is not employed for the purposes expected of an election campaign.

Overall, the cases of Haugaard and Gnarr merit study because they are political anomalies, first and foremost because they were *elected*. Although a number of comedians in different parts of the world have run humorous election campaigns over the years, most of them have been unsuccessful.

For example, American comedian Pat Paulsen produced slogans such as “We Can Be Decisive, Probably” and “United We Sit,” when he ran for president no less than six times between 1968 and 1996 (Keyes 2012). More recently, British comedian Al Murray ran for the 2015 general election in the UK, more specifically South Thanet, as his comedic persona “The Pub landlord.” Murray introduced both political slogans and promises, not to mention a manifesto. The latter was written on the back of a pack of cigarettes and included pledges to “make more stuff, sell it for profit” and to “build new houses for people who make stuff to live in” (Dathan 2015). Moreover, like Gnarr, Murray pledged to make “a load of promises I can’t keep. They [citizens of South Thanet] should expect nothing from me because I know I can deliver it” (Murray 2015).²

Thus, comedians running election campaigns and taking up common campaign genres such as the election promise or slogan is a relatively common phenomenon. Running election campaigns as “a joke,” in other words, is not so unusual—getting elected based on such campaigns is.

² The list of comedians running humorous election campaigns without success is long: It includes the American comedian Will Rogers, who ran for president as “the bunkless candidate” of the “Anti-Bunk Party” in the 1920s; the French comedian and actor commonly known as Coluche, who ran for president in 1981 in France; the Mexican comedy group “Lagrimita y Costel” that for a short while ran for office in the Mexican state Guadalajara in 2015; and British comedian Eddie Izzard, who has announced he intends to run for Mayor of London or MP in 2020 (see e.g., Keyes 2012; Morse 2013).

By comparison far fewer comedians actually have been elected. Apart from the Brazilian clown Tiririca and the German satirist Martin Sonnenborn’s “Die PARTEI,” as mentioned in the preface, the Italian comedian and political activist Beppe Grillo, who founded the political party *Movimento 5 Stelle*, “Five Star Movement,” is one such example. Moreover, comedian and actor Jimmy Morales was elected president of Guatemala in 2015, and former writer and comedic actor on *Saturday Night Live* Al Franken was senator of Minnesota from 2008 to 2017.

In fact, Haugaard's election in 1994 is the earliest example I have come across.³ Of course, there may very well have been others before him, but it nevertheless appears to be an extraordinary case for its time. This would also explain why the news of one Danish comedian's electoral success—and particularly his unusual election promises—caught the attention of foreign media such as *BBC Radio*, *London Broadcasting Company*, *The Mainichi Newspapers* (Japan), *Deutsche Presse Agentur*, *Aftonbladet* (Sweden), *The Economist*, and *Financial Times* (see *Ritzaus Bureau* 1994; Rasmussen 1994). Likewise, Gnarr's win also generated press coverage from all over the world, including *The Wall Street Journal* (Casey 2010), *The Telegraph* (2010), *Ugebrevet A4* (Denmark) (Weiss 2010), and *Der Tagesspiegel* (Gehrmann 2010). Adding to this, the comedians also received extensive national attention, as the case studies will show. In both countries the elections became a matter of considerable interest and importance, which also reflects the significance of the cases.

Yet another extraordinary aspect of Haugaard's election is the fact that only one other candidate before him ever in Denmark has been elected as an independent candidate (*løsgænger*), that is, a candidate without party affiliation (Folketinget 2017).⁴ It is, in other words, highly unusual for independent candidates to be elected, because it requires 15,000–20,000 personal votes in a limited district. Thus, Haugaard's case in particular is extraordinary in the sense that he not only was an elected comedian, but also an elected comedian without any party affiliation.

Other unusual circumstances relative to both cases include, first, that neither comedian had an actual political program (thus no stated political goals or visions), as already mentioned. Second, both comedians left politics at the end of their election period (approximately four years) without running for a second term. This, too, is unusual in the

³ Before Haugaard's election in 1994 only one other example of a comedian being elected for office has surfaced, namely former Secretary of State for Scotland (among other titles) Ian Lang. Before his political career started in the 1970s, Lang performed at the Edinburgh fringe in 1962 alongside John Cleese and Graham Chapman (known from Monty Python) in Cambridge Footlights revue (*Spectator* 2013). However, judging from his long and serious career in politics (more than 20 years), he most likely did not run a humorous election campaign.

There are earlier examples of singers, actors, and/or entertainers, who have pursued political careers, such as George Murphy (elected to the US Senate in 1964) and Sonny Bono (elected for mayor of Palm Springs, California in 1988), but none of them were comedians.

⁴ The first candidate, Hans Schmidt, was elected in 1953.

world of politics, and is particularly notable in Gnarr's case, since polls showed a 35 percent support for a second term (Magnússon 2014).

In a wider perspective, the cases merit study because they represent a contemporary phenomenon captured in the notion: celebrity politics. In recent years, a growing body of literature has been devoted to so-called celebrity politics, that is, the prominence of celebrities in the realm of politics (see e.g., Marshall 1997; van Zoonen 2005; Marsh, Hart, and Tindall 2010; Street 2012). Comedians running for elections are thus part of a wider trend of celebrities 'moving' into politics, and the scholarly attention paid to this phenomenon reflects not only its prominence, but also the timeliness of investigating the topic. I will expand on celebrity politics in Chapter 2.

A related and also contemporary phenomenon is that of humor or rather entertainment blending with politics. Current scholarship mirrors this fusion of fields: Scholars from media studies, sociology, anthropology, political science, rhetoric, etc., study political humor with respect to, for instance, the use of humor by politicians (e.g., Smith and Voth 2002; Morreall 2005; Mueller 2011) and political activists (Boyer and Yurchak 2010; Higgle 2014), satirical news (Reilly 2010; Amarasingam 2011), and the political content of late-night comedy shows (Niven 2003; Goodnow 2011) along with its potential effects (Baum 2002; Cao and Brewer 2008; Moy, Xenos, and Hess 2005; Young 2004; Baumgartner and Morris 2012).

While much research especially has been devoted to political comedy shows, and to *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and *The Colbert Report* in particular, little research by comparison has been conducted on cases of comedians-turned-politicians—especially on the cases of Haugaard and Gnarr to which I will return shortly. This dissertation thus focuses on cases reflecting a contemporary phenomenon in its most extraordinary or extreme form, namely comedians engaging in politics by *becoming* politicians themselves.

Despite the extensive national attention both comedians received upon their victories, neither case has been made the subject of major scholarly efforts. The majority of available studies concerning Haugaard's election are conducted within the field of political science that only briefly mention the unusual election of a comedian and independent candidate in 1994 (e.g., Vigsø 2004; Kurrild-Klitgaard 2005, 2008; Elmelund-Præstekær and Schumacher 2014). For instance, a study in the journal *Parliamentary Affairs* draws on the

election of Haugaard and celebrities in other European countries to illustrate how campaigning strategies associated with those in the USA are now used in Europe (Downs 2012).

More scholars have scrutinized Gnarr's election, both nationally and internationally. However, apart from a research article on the impact of Gnarr's leadership as mayor (Guðmundsdóttir 2016), literature searches in Icelandic primarily yield master theses, one of which empirically examines how Gnarr performed as Mayor of Reykjavík (Karlsson 2015), for example, and another the motivations behind the foundation of his political party, The Best Party (Árnadóttir 2011).

Research in English is more prominent. Most recently, Bjarki Valtýsson (2015) has analyzed how Gnarr communicated to the public on his Facebook page 'The Mayor's Diary' after he was elected as Mayor of Reykjavík. His article also provides some insight into Gnarr's election campaign. Anthropologist Hulda Proppé (2014) elucidates the rise of The Best Party, i.e., the circumstances and elements of the election campaign. As sister of a prominent Best Party member, Ottarr Proppé, she has had special access to the party and therefore draws on personal experiences with The Best Party when describing their campaign and motivations for entering politics. Dominic Boyer (2013) also contributes with an anthropological analysis of The Best Party with emphasis on the political movement's blurring of parody and political sincerity and what this reveals about northern political culture. Sigríður Lára Sigurjónsdóttir (2013) approaches The Best Party's political campaign as a theatrical performance when analyzing the campaign and Gnarr's strategies in the media.

These studies aid our understanding of the context of the election, the general atmosphere in the country following the financial crisis, and the chain of events and strategies applied in The Best Party's election campaign. The analytical work conducted in this dissertation will add genre based analyses of The Best Party's election material focusing on how Gnarr made use of the election genre for other purposes than getting elected.

Selection of case material

The selected material in the case studies contains a number of primary and secondary sources and is multi-generic and multimodal. Each case study includes a broad

range of election material for analysis in order to characterize the campaigns as comprehensively as possible. Given the diverse nature of the material (e.g., digital and non-digital, audiovisual and verbal), which reflects the various ways in which the two comedians utilize humor, we also can come to a better understanding of the use of humor in campaigns more generally.

Establishing this material, however, poses several challenges, as both campaigns are what one might call 'campaigns in the now.' The material presented in each case study is, in effect, what is left of the actual events. Some material inevitably has been lost over time and must be reconstructed through use of secondary sources. For example, Haugaard's election events can only be reconstructed through second-hand descriptions in the media of people who were there to witness the events and describe the atmosphere at the time. Moreover, Gnarr created a blog and a campaign website for The Best Party, both of which no longer exist today. However, parts of the website can be reconstructed through media coverage and through texts originally published on the website, which are reproduced in Gnarr's autobiography, and thereby provide a general impression of it.

Despite this loss of material over time, looking at the events now from a distance also has its advantages. It allows for a more comprehensible overview of the campaigns, than what would have been possible at the actual time they took place. Determining the historical, cultural, and political context of the campaigns, and their significance, is also fitting at this point, as we now know that they extraordinarily led to the success of two highly unlikely candidates. This aspect, in particular, was a strong motivation for choosing these cases.

Haugaard case material

In the Haugaard case study, my primary sources of material are seven election posters, and press cuttings describing Haugaard's election meetings and events. The election posters are the most central election material from his campaigns, as Haugaard did not have a political program, for example. The posters include his many election promises and also provide insights into how Haugaard visually represented himself as a political candidate. The posters are not accessible on the Internet or in any book—Haugaard only includes fragments of the posters or a few low quality images of them in his autobiography. Five of the posters can be found at the archives of Dansk Plakatumuseum (Danish Poster

museum) in Åbyhøj close to Aarhus. The last two are not publicly available. However, Haugaard himself graciously helped me gain access to them, as he photographed the posters for me at his home and e-mailed them.

Furthermore, I analyze Haugaard's interpersonal communication with voters in the campaigns through press cuttings describing the public election events, which he hosted and attended. These interpersonal campaign activities were a central part of his campaigns and not only generated extensive media coverage, but also attracted many people to join the events. The chapter therefore studies numerous press cuttings to provide better insight into his campaigns and into the atmosphere, form, and content of these events.

I principally have used two Danish databases, *Infomedia* and *Mediestream*, to search for press coverage of Haugaard and SABAE (the political movement he joined), the campaigns, and their campaign activities between 1st of October 1979 and 21st of September 1994 (the day of his election). Infomedia is a database of media coverage and Mediestream is the Royal Library's digital collection of Danish newspapers, commercials, and radio and TV broadcasts. Together, they provide an extensive amount of material, primarily press cuttings. For instance, a search in Mediestream for "Jacob Haugaard" yields more than 16,000 hits and SABAE yields 1,006 hits. In order to narrow my search results, I have added more search words such as "valgsmøde [election meeting]" (31 hits); "SABAE" (159 hits); "øl [beer]" (531 hits); and "julegaver [Christmas presents]" (236 hits).

The main sources of press cuttings are the national newspapers *Berlingske Tidende* and *Politiken*; the national tabloid newspapers *B.T.* and *Ekstra Bladet*; and the local newspaper *Århus Stiftstidende*. I also make use of a variety of other local newspapers, though to a lesser extent, such as *Herning Folkeblad*, *Skive Folkeblad*, *Midtjyllands Avis*, and *Aalborg Stiftstidende*, as well as the national newspapers *Information*, *Weekendavisen*, and *Jyllands-Posten*.

I moreover study news articles to help establish how SABAE's election campaigns took place over the years and the type of media exposure they received. Interviews with SABAE's founders, Paul Smith and Gustav Bunzel, also provide insights into the motivations and political convictions fundamental to SABAE. Bunzel moreover refers to SABAE on his website: gustavbunzel.dk.

In order to describe Haugaard's background and careers, I rely on a 50 minutes long television program (*Fak2'eren*) from 1995 that portrays Haugaard's life—personally and

professionally. Additionally, I study Haugaard's autobiography *Det ærede medlem: Hofnarren!* (The honorary member: The court jester!) (1999)⁵ and Helle Møller Christensen's biography *En gøgler på strandvejen* (An entertainer on strandvejen)⁶ (1999). Haugaard's autobiography, which mainly is an account of Haugaard's unusual political career, begins in 1977, just before he became acquainted with the political movement, SABAE ("Sammenslutningen af Bevidst Arbejdssky Elementer") ("the Union of Conscientiously Work-shy Elements")⁷, and ends in 1998, when he finished his four-year term and decided not to run for re-election. In addition to personal anecdotes, the autobiography includes pictures of Haugaard and a variety of genres such as selected speeches in Parliament, song lyrics, and his responses to constituents, which he wrote while he was an MP.

The biography on Haugaard traces his life from childhood through 1999. It details his background, personal life, and musical, comedic, and political careers. It also contains statements about Haugaard, from his campaign manager, friends, and family, and includes Haugaard's own reactions, and those of others, to his election. The biography is useful as it offers an alternative view on Haugaard's election and campaigns that counters his personal account in his autobiography.

Moreover, though to a lesser degree, I draw on a SABAE publication, *Arbejdsmfrihedens spøgelse* (The ghost of work-freedom) (1979), and a book published by Haugaard and Smith, *Håndbog for førstegangsvælgere* (Manual for first-time voters) (1994). The back cover blurb of the SABAE publication describes it as "a collection of Scandinavian texts that radically dismisses the 'official opinion' on the luxurious life of paid employment. Let unemployment become work-freedom!" The book includes a preface by Haugaard, SABAE's manifesto in two parts, and satirical writings and song lyrics by different authors, focusing on communism and the right to be lazy. The second publication by Haugaard and

⁵ Both Haugaard and Gnarr have written autobiographies, which I make use of as primary sources in the case studies. I do so, because they contain information that is not found elsewhere. In relying on these autobiographies I acknowledge that they carry no particular authority simply *because* they are autobiographies. On the other hand, the knowledge we may extract from these personal narratives is not necessarily false simply because the comedians themselves are the sources.

⁶ Strandvejen is a well-known boulevard north of Copenhagen, where the upper class lives.

⁷ The translation is based on the movement's Wikipedia page:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_of_Conscientiously_Work-Shy_Elements

Smith is a guide to the Danish election system. It provides a satirical overview of the Danish political landscape and outlines, among other things, what a national election is and what a mandate means. The last part of the book focuses on SABAE and its work-shy foundation, and Haugaard's 1994 election.⁸

Secondarily, I have sought information concerning the production and placing of SABAE's election posters by emailing Paul Smith, as this information is not available in any archive or report. I also include historical sources that inform us of the political and cultural landscape in the decades Haugaard ran his election campaigns—the 1970s to the 1990s—in Denmark and also, more specifically, in the town of Aarhus where Haugaard is from.

Gnarr case material

In the case study of Gnarr, my primary sources are Gnarr's blog, The Best Party's website, two texts posted on this website, The Best Party's Facebook page, and videos uploaded on YouTube during the campaign. Since The Best Party's campaign principally took place online, I analyze a variety of the material on various platforms and belonging to various genres to give an impression as full as possible of the campaign. However, neither Gnarr's blog nor The Best Party's website exist any longer. I therefore make use of press cuttings and Gnarr's autobiography as primary sources for additional information about these platforms in order to reconstruct how they were employed and the function they served in the campaign. I will present these press cuttings and Gnarr's autobiography shortly. The two texts originally published on the website, The Best Party's party program and its so-called "moral code," which I furthermore examine, are included in Gnarr's autobiography.

The Best Party also launched a Facebook page, which still exists. I examine all posts and comments made between its start on 31st of January 2010 through 29th of May,

⁸ Prior to this book, Haugaard and Smith also published *Hvis arbejde er sundt, så giv det til de syge!* (If work is healthy, then give it to the sick!) (1986). It is best characterized as a collection of material from SABAE's campaigns in 1979, 1981, and 1984, as well as other satirical writings. Most of the writing is by Paul Smith, with some by Haugaard and some by the SABAE. The pieces include speeches, anecdotes from SABAE events, selections from a newsletter or election newspaper called "Stemmeslugeren" ("The vote-catcher") centered on Haugaard's 1981 campaign, satirical song lyrics (often used for revues), and other election material.

Election Day. Finally, I analyze YouTube videos, which The Best Party uploaded during the campaign. Some of these videos can no longer be found on YouTube⁹ but are included in a documentary about Gnarr, which I describe shortly. One video entitled “The Best Video,” which was uploaded close to the election in May 2010, is, however, still available on YouTube.

I furthermore make use of press cuttings about Gnarr and The Best Party. As mentioned, some articles provide information about The Best Party’s campaign that I cannot find elsewhere, or about election material that does not exist any longer. Moreover, I have utilized press cuttings for collecting interviews to illustrate how Gnarr represented himself in the media (e.g., his motivations for creating the party) and The Best Party’s political visions, thereby reflecting The Best Party’s campaign performance strategy. Press coverage that includes public reactions to the campaign and The Best Party’s electoral success also has been taken into account.

For finding press coverage, I primarily have used the Icelandic search database *Tímarit.is*, which is managed by the national and university library of Iceland (*Landsbókasafn Íslands – Háskólabókasafn*), and the search engine on www.mbl.is, which is the website of the Icelandic national newspaper *Morgunblaðið*. I also have employed the Danish search database *Infomedia* to a lesser extent. Moreover, I have found links to press coverage posted by The Best Party on its Facebook page. Articles about, for example, the party’s rise in the polls and interviews with Gnarr or other party members. Apart from *Morgunblaðið* and mbl.is, my main sources of news articles are the Icelandic National Broadcasting Service *Ríkisútvarpið* or *RÚV*, the online newspaper *visir.is*, and the tabloid newspaper *Dagblaðið Vísir* or *DV*. Moreover, I draw on several articles from the online magazine in English *The Reykjavík Grapevine*. Some are interviews with Gnarr before his election, and some are articles that focus on particular aspects relating to The Best Party or Gnarr.

⁹ For example, in her article, Sigurjónsdóttir includes a link (in note 3) that is no longer active to a YouTube video uploaded 19th of January 2010 in which Gnarr apparently announced his candidacy (Sigurjónsdóttir 2013, 99).

Moreover, as a primary source I rely on a documentary about Gnarr and The Best Party's election campaign conveniently titled *Gnarr* (2010).¹⁰ Gaukur Úlfarsson, who also acted as campaign manager for The Best Party, directed the documentary, which follows the comedian and political candidate from January 2010, four months before the election, to his mayoral victory in May 2010. It gives an impression of how the election campaign and polls developed, who Gnarr and his party members are, and how they think and act. For example, the documentary's soundtrack reflects their predilection for punk rock music and their artistic image. The documentary includes video monologues of Gnarr, interviews, and scenes with him giving real-time speeches in actual situations. Furthermore, it provides background information on the economic collapse in Iceland—a circumstance of significant importance when examining the election of The Best Party.

I also study Gnarr's autobiography *Gnarr! How I became the mayor of a large city in Iceland and changed the world* (2014) as a primary source. The autobiography mainly is an account of Gnarr's life (from childhood to adult career and mayor of Reykjavík), The Best Party (from foundation to election and time in city hall) and the election campaign, and Gnarr's thoughts on and experiences with politics (from citizen to political candidate to mayor). Apart from this account, the book includes texts originally published on The Best Party website as mentioned, as well as an interview in the middle of the book with Gnarr's wife, and a letter Gnarr sent to the former President of The United States of America, Barack Obama.

Secondarily, I include sources that inform us of the cultural, political, and historical context of the time of Gnarr's election, most significantly the financial crisis in Iceland. The case chapter moreover relies on the aforementioned research by Proppé (2015), Sigurjónsdóttir (2013), and Boyer (2013), as well as the writings of Icelandic writers and public debaters Einar Már Guðmundsson and Andri Snær Magnason, for a better understanding of the atmosphere in the country and Gnarr's personality and comedy style.

Theoretical approach to case studies: Genre

At its simplest, genre designates "the various types, classes, or categories of discursive practice that can serve as objects of study" (Jasinski 2001, 268). Needless to say,

¹⁰ The documentary is accessible on YouTube here (seen 18th of September 2017): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iUraTP6d6cg>

scholarship on genre offers a wide range of far more complex definitions of genre, but the most common understanding in contemporary genre studies is a rhetorical or functional understanding of genre as a type of action (Auken 2015a, 48; Auken 2015b, 156–57; Devitt 2004, 13). Conventionally, however, genre is considered a classification system that labels types of texts according to their formal characteristics (Devitt 2004, 5). Up until the beginning of the 1980s, genre studies primarily were confined to the literary field. But in recent decades, the study of genre has become the interest of scholars from a diversity of fields, though by far dominated by rhetoric and linguistics. Consequently, the conventional formal view on genre has been overshadowed by a functional view, most significantly associated with Carolyn R. Miller (1984). In her seminal 1984 article “Genre as Social Action,” Miller defines genres as “typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations” (159). Rather than focus a definition of genre on form and substantive characteristics, her definition foregrounds the *function* of a genre or the type of *action* a genre is used to perform. It is, in other words, the function that designates the genre.

Miller’s study marks a shift in the history of genre studies, since most contemporary scholarship takes up her definition of genre with some variation. In general terms such definitions commonly express, as Amy Devitt puts it, “that genre is action, that genre is typified action, that typification comes from recurring conditions, and that those conditions involve a social context” (Devitt 2004, 13). Miller’s study therefore is essential to what some scholars refer to as “the rhetorical turn in genre studies” (qtd. in Auken 2015b, 156) or “a ‘genre turn’ in rhetoric and composition studies” (Reiff and Bawarshi 2016, 5. See also: Bawarshi, Anis S. and Reiff 2010), as it brought along a redefinition of the concept.

Miller takes as her starting point Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson’s work. In the anthology, *Form and Genre: Shaping Rhetorical Action*, originally published in 1978, they define genre as “a constellation of recognizable forms bound together by an internal dynamic” (Campbell and Jamieson 1978, 336). Three kinds of forms, characteristics, or elements establish a genre: First, a genre is a response to perceived *situational* demands. Second and third, a genre entails *substantive* and *stylistic* elements strategically chosen to meet those perceived requirements of the situation. Substantive elements or strategies designate the content of the rhetorical artifact, and the stylistic strategies designate the form of the artifact. Differently put, a genre is constituted of substantive and stylistic forms, characteristics, or strategies (such as argumentation,

appeals, choice of style) and constitutes a strategic response to perceived situational requirements (ibid, 334).

The constellation of these forms is not random, but a fusion of elements that is distinctive of the genre. Sonja K. Foss (1989) labels this fusion or internal dynamic “the organizing principle,” that is, “the root term or the notion that serves as an umbrella term for the various characteristic features of the rhetoric” (112). It is, in other words, the dynamic of these elements that designates the genre and makes it distinctive or ‘significant.’

Miller extends this fusion, as explained by Campbell and Jamieson, and describes it as a fusion of substance and form that creates symbolically significant action. To understand genre as rhetorical action, she relates genre and situation or context by way of Lloyd F. Bitzer’s “The rhetorical situation” (1968). She notes that it is of particular significance to genre theory that rhetorical situations recur as Bitzer originally observed. But situations must be understood as social constructs, as Miller points out, because objectively situations cannot recur (1984, 156). One situation is never completely identical with another. Every situation is unique. Therefore, a recurrent situation is one that we interpret as recurrent, i.e., similar to the extent that it prompts a similar response. People construct recurring situations based on a stock of knowledge, or in Devitt’s words, “a socially created set of genres” (Devitt 2004, 20).

By consequence, Miller redefines Bitzer’s notion of exigence, which she describes as “an understanding of social need” (Miller 1984, 158). “Exigence must be seen neither as a cause of rhetorical action nor as intentions, but as social motive” (ibid). Our motives for doing things reflect our socialization. They derive from the social expectations we attempt to meet, or social needs we may have.

This point can be illustrated by way of an everyday genre: a job application (Auken 2015a, 49). In simple terms, the function or *social action* of a job application is to get the sender a job. Hence, getting a job is the sender’s exigence or social motive, as it fulfills certain social needs. In order to make this happen, the sender *acts* by writing a job application. The job application is, in other words, the sender’s response to his or her situation. Since looking for a job is a recurrent situation in most people’s lives, a job application has become a (standard) genre. The genre ‘job application’ therefore is a typified rhetorical action in response to a recurrent situation.

Thus, ultimately genres come into existence, because people in similar situations act in similar ways to reach similar social purposes. People do things through genres, and genres help people determine how to carry out particular social functions. For example, in her study of the genres or 'set of genres' (a notion I will explain later) most frequently used by tax accountants, Devitt finds that these genres may "help to define and stabilize" the profession's situations (1991, 340). "The mere existence of an established genre may encourage its continued use, and hence the continuation of the activities and relations associated with that genre" (ibid, 340-341). Since accountants find themselves in recurrent situations prompting similar responses, genres help them carry out their shared social purpose consistently and thus more efficiently. The potential negative of establishing these shared generic conventions, however, is that they may create unfruitful habits or expectations of the genre, thus restricting the invention of new and perhaps more rhetorically efficacious responses to situations. In turn, genres also may function as a guide, thus enabling "the most effective and efficient response to any recurring situation" (ibid, 342).

Similarly, studying the election campaign as genre and the genres it embeds, can serve as a guide for understanding the most effective responses to elections (i.e., recurring situations). However, as the case studies reveal, the comedians deliberately violate the conventions of the genre through 'ineffective' responses to the situation (the election). The purpose of their campaigns thus seems to be something other than fulfilling the primary social action of the election campaign genre, namely to get elected. I will return to define the election campaign as genre later.

A related notion, and also of relevance to this study, is that of 'uptake,' presented by Anne Freadman (Freadman 1994, 2002). The notion of uptake¹¹ originally derives from J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things With Words* (1976) and in Freadman's work it may be understood as "putting Miller's concept of genre as social action into motion" (Auken 2015a, 52). Rather than understanding the concept of genre in terms of a singular text, and the elements it is composed of, Freadman argues that it is more fruitful to apply genre to the *interaction* of texts. Uptake is the term she uses to describe the interaction, or

¹¹ For disambiguation of different uptakes, see: Dryer 2016.

“bidirectional relation,” between a pair of texts (Freadman 2002, 40). One text ‘takes’ another text as “an invitation or a request” (ibid). Otherwise expressed, one genre invites a response, that is, another genre (or respondent). Thus, genres are to be understood as uptakes and uptakes relate one genre to another, thereby aiding meanings to travel between and across genres (Reiff and Bawarshi 2016, 11).

By emphasizing the links and relations between genres Freadman thus advances the understanding of genre as social action. However, in her 2014 article she concludes that it is “misleading to speak of ‘genre as social action,’” as the phrasing suggests that genres *act*, when it is in fact us *using* the genre that accomplishes the action (Freadman 2014, A-5). The use of genre, she writes, “is never merely an instantiation of general rules or conventions or forms. This is broadly the conclusion of my work on uptake. If action there be, it occurs in a specific, occasioned, discursive event, and that event includes its effects and consequences” (ibid, A-6). Thus, the action is a product of what takes place in this discursive event, which involves both the use of a genre and its uptake. Formal and substantial characteristics of a genre alone cannot account for the action the genre is used to accomplish. Only by examining how a genre is taken up can we assess the act it performs.

But a genre can be ‘taken up’ differently. For instance, a job application may either invite an invitation for a job interview or a letter of rejection. There is, in other words, more than one possible uptake to probably any use of genre, and any use of genre therefore may not be taken up as the user had intended. Thus, “inviting or requesting a certain kind of response is not the same as getting it” (Auken 2015a, 53). The uptake text may either confirm the generic identity of a text or modify it to a greater or lesser extent. As Reiff and Bawarshi (2016) note, uptakes are “based in selection rather than causation” (4), that is, they are a product of individual choice, not predestined. In other words, there is an element of creativity involved in genre use, and the uptake text may surprise “by taking its object as some other kind” (Freadman 2002, 40).

This aspect of genre use highlights that genres are not fixed or stable—an observation Catherine F. Schryer also makes, when she describes genres as “stabilized-for-now or stabilized-enough sites of social and ideological action” (Schryer 1993, 208). While firmly established, genres are at the same time flexible and open to individual interpretation. New genres constantly arise and are modified or transform into yet other

genres—a point Miller (2017) takes up in her chapter: “Where Do Genres Come From?” She discusses the rise of new genres within different fields (e.g., literature, film, media) and professions through the concepts of genre innovation, emergence, and evolution. The question has many answers, as genres emerge in a number of ways: As hinted at above, genres come from other genres or “antecedent rhetorical forms” (Miller 2017, 17. See also: Jamieson 1973); by incorporating characteristics from existing genres or blending norms and generic conventions, old genres are transformed into new ones (ibid, 6-7). Genres furthermore arise in response to new authoritative directives (the US Constitution, for example), thus creating new rhetorical situations. Whether it is one factor or another giving rise to a genre, however, is not clear-cut: “The relative influence of the situation, audience expectations, individual choice, and antecedent genre can be understood only with detailed critical examination in specific cases” (ibid, 17).

Moreover, genres come from a change of conditions. Technological, economic, political, and historical change may incite genre change (ibid, 8). For instance, the development of new media and web technologies has given rise to new digital genres such as the blog and websites. New media has provided people an opportunity to do new things in new ways and thus invent new generic forms for performing a shared social function (creating online communities, for example) (C. R. Miller and Shepherd 2004). The rise of new media, moreover, has changed the way election campaigns are carried out today and thus has modified the election campaign as genre—a point to which I return in the next section. I also examine a selection of these new media genres and platforms in Gnarr’s case chapter.

In light of how prominent genre innovation and emergence is, one might ask if genres, then, are stable at all? Devitt (2009) argues that the stability of genres is in fact an illusion, since any genre will include instances of the genre that varies, either in form, substance, or context. Such individual variations will inevitably destabilize the genre (Devitt 2009, 40). Against Schryer’s description of genres as “stabilized-for now”, Devitt instead maintains: “Genres are destabilized for now and forever” (ibid, 39).

The comedians’ election campaigns also reflect destabilization, even destruction, of conventional campaign genres. While the comedians employ recognizable genres, such as the election poster, campaign website, and political ad, they at the same time violate the generic conventions of those genres, and far from making simple modifications they distort

and thus change the genres. By consequence, they change the social action of the entire election campaign. As briefly mentioned in the preface, this dissertation understands the election campaign as a genre that overarches campaign related genres such as the abovementioned. I therefore proceed to describe the generic characteristics of an election campaign and the variety of genres election campaigns embody.

The election campaign as genre

Although an election campaign is not usually described in terms of genre, academic literature as well as handbooks written by professional campaign managers provide definitions and descriptions of political campaigns, which overlap in distinct ways with basic genre definitions. For instance, in *Political Campaign Communication* chapter seven is dedicated to “Recurring Forms of Political Campaign Communication” (Trent et al. 2016, 161). Based on Bitzer’s “The Rhetorical Situation,” the authors argue: “[T]he basic premise that some rhetorical situations are relatively analogous and hence produce relatively analogous discourse is a valuable premise for the study of much political campaign communication” (ibid). The chapter identifies four recurring forms—announcement speeches, acceptance speeches, press conferences, and political apologies—and proceeds to describe the *situations* of which these forms arise, the *purposes* they usually serve, and the *strategies* most often employed by successful candidates using these recurring forms (ibid).

While the authors do not use the genre label, they easily could have gone one step further and applied Miller’s definition of genres as “typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations” in this passage to explain the nature of political campaigns. Since the exigence of election campaigns is basically the same (winning the election), they prompt typified rhetorical actions or recurring forms of discourse. Adding to this, election campaigns effortlessly may be understood as recurrent situations, since election terms are for a limited time period and elections commonly recur every second, fourth, or sixth year. Because elections recur, candidates find themselves in similar situations with similar rhetorical needs, and as a result respond similarly to those situations. Genres thus emerge as recurring forms.

Martin and Rose’s working definition of genres as “staged, goal oriented social processes” (2008, 6) also provides grounds for addressing the election campaign as genre.

Genres are staged, they write, “because it usually takes more than one step to reach our goals; goal oriented because we feel frustrated if we don’t accomplish the final steps [...]; social because writers shape their texts for readers of particular kinds” (ibid) Similarly, election campaigns often are described as progressing in stages, e.g., pre-primary, primary, convention, and general election (Trent et al. 2016, ch. 2), or simply expressed in numbers from one to four (Foot and Schneider 2006, xxi).

Moreover, since election campaigns only take place in connection with elections, they are clearly goal oriented or functional. William L. Benoit emphasizes this aspect as he addresses election campaigns through Functional Theory (Benoit 2007; Benoit 2017. See also: Benoit and Sheafer 2006; Benoit and Compton 2014). The theory is well-suited for analyzing campaign communication, he argues, as it regards campaign messages as instrumental, that is, employed as means to an end: getting elected (Benoit 2007, 32). In the same vein, election campaigns commonly are defined as, for instance, “the attempt of political candidates to maximize their number of votes within a limited time frame in order to win office” (Tolstrup 2013, 11, my translation from Danish). Or, simply put, as “exercises in communicating a simple message: ‘vote for me,’ or, ‘don’t vote for my opponent’” (Davis et al. 2009, 15). Others describe the function of election campaigns in commercial terms: The political candidate is ‘the product’ that the election campaign attempts to ‘sell’ by promoting certain attitudes, opinions, and personal characteristics (Tuman 2008, 13-14). Although candidates sometimes principally campaign in order to promote an attitude or message, and not themselves, these instances are the exceptions to the rule (Benoit 2007, 19). Thus, however different election campaigns may be, they first and foremost aim to accomplish the same social action: winning votes and thereby winning the election.

Given the use of genre terms in campaign literature and overlaps of definitions it is relatively simple to apply the genre perspective to the election campaign. Of course, the election campaign as genre is not a watertight category as campaigns come in great variety. But since election campaigns essentially serve the same function, they are easily approached through genre theory.

In terms of the formal and substantial features of election campaigns, they come in many shapes and sizes. A candidate may run for a myriad of elective offices (e.g., parliament, prime minister, city council, mayor, senate, governor, president) in a myriad of ways.

Nevertheless, campaigns involve recurring forms, as noted above, that relate to a number of common campaign activities including: public speaking (speeches in debates, announcements etc.), interpersonal communication between candidate and voter (at public events, door-to-door canvass, etc.), contact with media (through press releases, interviews, media events etc.), and advertising (on print, TV, radio, or online) (see e.g., Shaw 2018; Trent et al. 2016; Tolstrup 2013; Maarek 2011).

In recent years, campaigns also have started to take form online and employed a variety of web-based tools (websites, Facebook, YouTube etc.). In the U.S., the 2000 presidential election was named the “first Internet election” by many critics, and online campaigning in general has expanded ever since the emergence of the World Wide Web in the beginning of the 1990s (Foot and Schneider 2006, 8-10). Whereas the uses of web technologies for campaigning initially were limited to primarily e-mail and websites, they today include use of social media such as Facebook and YouTube (Trent et al. 2016, 290). The 2000s thus mark a paradigm shift in the use of digital communication technologies in election campaigns, and the communication resources afforded by the Internet are crucial in electoral politics today (ibid, 290-292).

Additionally, political campaign literature commonly describes a number of roles in campaigns (party members, campaign managers, volunteers, consultants, specialists etc.) that carry out tasks, which also reflect the generic characteristics of a campaign. For example, the Danish handbook *Kampagnelederen* (*The campaign manager*) includes a long list of activities that the campaign manager facilitates, such as recruiting volunteers and making the budget, and practical advice for how to meet the electorate and handle the media (Tolstrup 2013, see list of contents). In an American context, Tuman mentions that campaign consultants potentially handle no less than 56 tasks, such as speechwriting, advertising, fundraising, and preparing the candidate for debates (2008, 26-30).

Another approach to the substance of political campaigns is Functional Theory, as mentioned above (Benoit 2007). The theory rests on several principles, which concern the nature of political campaigns: First, a candidate must be perceived as preferable to his or her opponents. Thus, a candidate need not be perfect, but simply *appear* as a more favorable candidate than others appear, nor win all votes, just enough votes to win. Second, and following this, candidates need to differentiate themselves from opponents, and, third, they may emphasize those differences through political campaign messages (ibid, 34-35).

Fourth, candidates gain favorability through three rhetorical strategies: acclaiming, attacking, and defending. *Acclaims* center on the candidate's desirability or advantages, *attacks* emphasize the opponent's shortcomings, and *defenses* are used "to restore, or prevent additional damage to, a candidate's perceived preferability" (ibid, 39). The fifth principle states that candidates ascertain their preferability to voters by focusing on either policy or character, i.e., how they will act and who they are (ibid, 44). Policy statements fall into three subcategories: past deeds, future plans, and general goals. Character also is divided into three subcategories focusing on the candidate's personal qualities (e.g., honesty), leadership ability (e.g., experience in office), and ideals (values and principles) (ibid, 53-54).

I will return to these principles in the case chapters. At this point I will simply note that the sensational aspect of the comedians' campaigns and subsequent electoral success relates to the fifth principle in particular. In both cases, the comedians caught national as well as international attention based on their extraordinary, silly, not to mention impossible, election promises. Thus, policy statements are distorted or simply missing from their election campaigns. Adding to this, neither comedian made any attempt to hide the fact that they had no political experience or knowledge.

Genres and genre hierarchies in election campaigns

The genre analysis of the election campaign illustrates that an election campaign is a complex genre characterized by a large variety of utterances, as it embodies a large number of generic forms, both digital and non-digital, such as debates, press releases, promises, ads, public events, speeches, websites etc. These genres thus form a "genre set" (Devitt 1991). In her study of genre use within the tax accounting community, Amy Devitt identifies 13 genres which she describes as "a set of genres interacting to accomplish the work of the tax department" (Devitt 1991, 339-40). Based on interviews with tax accountants and samples of the kinds of texts they produce in their work (e.g., the opinion letter, tax provision review), Devitt not only describes the texts, but also how they refer to and draw from one another, and how the texts interact in the tax accounting community. A genre set thus designates the variety of genres or "patterns of genres" (Auken 2018, 18) used by a group to perform a social function.

Accordingly, the genres embodied in an election campaign form a set, which illustrates the “situations, recurring activities and relations” (Devitt 1991, 340) of election candidates and campaign staff. Thus, each new genre represents a new rhetorical situation and rhetorical need. For example, the rhetorical need or function of interpersonal communication during a campaign, generally speaking, is to establish personal contact and relations to voters (see Chapter 3), whereas the rhetorical need of a campaign website is to reach and inform voters and the press and develop a community (see Chapter 4). Overall, however, the genre set of an election campaign enables the candidate and campaign staff to accomplish a shared social purpose: winning votes and thereby the election.

A related notion is genre system or “systems of genres,” which include multiple genre sets (Bazerman 1994). As Bazerman points out, a genre set only represents “one side of a multiple person interaction,” that is, in Devitt’s study, the side of tax accountants (83). Genre systems, in turn, also take into account all other genre sets used in this interaction, for example, the responses from government or clients to the letters from the tax department. Genre systems thus cover “the full interaction, the full event, the set of social relations that has been enacted” (ibid). In the case of the election campaign, the genre system would include not only the relations and activities of the candidate running and his campaign staff, but also the responses to these activities from voters, the media, and other candidates or parties.

Below are two lists of the most central genres in each comedian’s election campaign or campaigns, which are analyzed in the case studies:

Genres of analysis in Haugaard’s campaigns:

- Interpersonal communication: public events, election meetings etc.
- The election promise
- The election slogan
- The election poster

Genres of analysis in Gnarr’s campaign:

- The election promise
- The election slogan
- The blog

- The campaign website
- The party program
- The “moral code”
- The Best Party’s Facebook page
- Campaign videos and a political ad on YouTube

These lists are by no means exhaustive, but merely present some of the most essential genres forming the genre sets in each case. The most obvious difference between the lists is the prominent use of digital genres in Gnarr’s campaign in contrast to Haugaard’s campaigns. Thus, the lists reveal that genre sets change over time. The digital genres (website, blog) and social media platforms (YouTube, Facebook), which were relatively common to use for campaigning in 2010, were not available to Haugaard in the years he campaigned. Moreover, Haugaard does not have an official party program or platform, which is an unusual genre to be missing in an election campaign. Haugaard only refers to his election promises as his ‘election program’ (e.g., *Ekstra Bladet* 1992) but otherwise presents no official document stating his visions or long-term plan if elected. Last, Haugaard’s interpersonal communication is not easily categorized as public events or election meetings, for instance. Most of his election events are labeled “election meetings” by the media but at the same time they are characterized as “untraditional” (e.g., Kaptain 1991). Thus, his events challenge the genre.

In Gnarr’s list of genres one may observe that a “moral code” is not a common genre relative to an election campaign, a political party, or a campaign website. The rhetorical motive behind including such a ‘foreign’ genre is of significance. Thus, it is just as interesting what is in the lists as what is missing from them, that is, from the campaigns. The case chapters will elaborate on each genre and its characteristics when examining how they were employed in the comedians’ campaigns.

Second, the internal relationship or hierarchy between the genres in the lists is also of significance. For example, the election promise is a genre on its own, but is also embedded in many other genres such as the election poster and interpersonal communication in Haugaard’s case, and the party program, the website, and the political ad in Gnarr’s case. Moreover, the website embeds both the party program and moral code, which then embed the election promise. Determining the actual hierarchy between these

genres thus is complicated, since one genre may be at different 'levels' at the same time or embed one genre while another embeds it.

Third, and closely connected to this: Since these genres are employed in the context of an election campaign, they all are employed in order to fulfill the social action of an election campaign: winning votes and the election. Even though each genre reflects a new situation and rhetorical need, it nevertheless performs a shared social purpose as part of the genre set. Put differently, the overall genre (election campaign) embodies a large number of (simpler) genres and in so doing, it *re-contextualizes* these genres, i.e., it alters the function and meaning of the genres (Auken, n.d., 3).¹² However, the subgenres carry their own distinctive marks when embedded in the overarching genre and thus add their characteristics to the new context. While the overall genre alters the meaning and function of the genres it embeds, the embedded genres simultaneously impact the new generic context they become a part of. "A genre will to a large extent be defined by the genres it embeds, and will in turn define those genres" (ibid, 4). Understanding a complex genre, such as an election campaign, therefore demands understanding the range of simpler genres from which it is created. Examining the genre sets in the comedians' election campaigns, as the case chapters do, thus aid our understanding of these campaigns and the comedians' electoral success.

¹² Auken identifies two types of embedding: Re-contextualized embedding and contextualized embedding. The fundamental difference between the two forms is that in contextualized embedding, the embedded genres maintain their original functions and social actions, and in re-contextualized embedding, the embedded genres are transformed as they assume the social action of the overarching genre (5).

2. Humor: definitions, applications, and functions

As humor was central to the comedians' election campaigns and thus to their wins, this chapter explores common humor definitions, theories, and applications, and the rhetorical functions it may serve. The rhetorical approach to humor is fitting as it offers insights into the ways humor may be used strategically as a persuasive means when it is used in the context of a political election campaign.

The chapter initially develops the definition of humor applied in this dissertation and delimits the type of humorous communication examined in the case studies to political humor, thereby highlighting the critical function it may serve. From here, it moves to consider the blending of politics, media, and humor or entertainment in contemporary society, as the development of modern political communication also provides a contextual framework for the cases.

The chapter proceeds to outline the three dominant theories of humor in humor studies: the superiority theory, the incongruity theory, and the relief theory. The historical thinkers and ideas examined in this review help elucidate key aspects of the case studies, such as how the comedians' humorous election campaigns deviated from the campaign genre, and how the comedians also deviated from rhetorical recommendations for using humor, but nevertheless had persuasive success. Such aspects are pursued in the last section of the chapter entitled "Humor as a rhetorical strategy: recommendations, warnings, and manifestations." Under three headings I expand on ideas, some of which were presented in the previous outline, and investigate central notions relative to the understanding of how humor can be used as a rhetorical strategy and the functions it may serve in a political context. The last subsection reviews the three notions: irony, parody, and satire, as they particularly characterize the case material. An examination of the notions therefore is of relevance to understand how the comedians violate the election genre and to what end.

Terminology, definitions, and contextual framework

Scholarship on humor is beyond vast. It is dense, immense, and complex. *Encyclopedia of Humor Studies* (2014) can help illustrate this: It contains over 300 entries from 200 contributors on such different areas of humor as "The Health Benefits of Humor,"

both psychological and physical, “Linguistic Theories of Humor,” “Cross-Cultural Humor,” and “Humor in Education” (Attardo 2014b, see “List of entries”). This informs us of the widespread interest in humor, the variety of humor research, and the many approaches to humor from different research fields. For a ‘funny’ topic, humor has been taken quite seriously.

Humor is, at Critchley notes in *On humour* (2002), “a distinctively modern notion” (84). It was not until the late 17th century that humor as a term was used in relation to something comic or jovial. An earlier meaning of humor originates from ancient Greek medicine and denotes the four body fluids (“humors”) that regulate human health (ibid). Furthermore, writers in the 18th century distinguished between wit and humor: “Wit involved playing with ideas or words, whereas humor occurred when the object of the laughter was a person” (Billig 2005, 61). Moreover, in his influential work *Der Witz* from 1905, Sigmund Freud makes a distinction between jokes, the comic, and humor. Each of these types elicits laughter, but the pleasure derives from different psychological tasks. As Freud notes: “The pleasure in jokes has seemed to us to arise from an economy in expenditure upon inhibition, the pleasure in the comic from an economy in expenditure of ideation (upon cathexis) and the pleasure in humour from an economy in expenditure upon feeling” (Freud 1963, 236). Accordingly, humor is a narrow term in the Freudian sense, as it differs from jokes and the comic. I will return to Freud and *Der Witz* later.

Thus, the meaning of humor has changed significantly over the centuries and attempts at pinning down its definition have been many and widespread—in fact, so many and so widespread that Salvatore Attardo claims “it is impossible to define ‘a priori’ the category of humor, let alone to provide more detailed internal subdivisions” (Attardo 1994, 3). Zwagerman phrases the difficulty as follows: “The problem is not that all past definitions and theories of humor are wrong, but that they are all right—somewhat and sometimes. But they all invite easy exceptions, and as comprehensive explanations, they fall short”. Therefore, humor is often identified as the general, all-inclusive category “covering any event or object that elicits laughter, amuses, or is felt to be funny” (Attardo 1994, 4. See also: Zijderfeld 1983, 2; Raskin 1985, 8; Palmer 1994, 3). Billig, furthermore, has a simple, but clear definition of humor as “a general term describing a wide variety of things that supposedly make people laugh” (Billig 2005, 61).

Similarly, this dissertation works with the definition of humor as the overarching category that encompasses all types of communication intended to raise laughter or amuse. Such communication may be expressed in writing, in drawings, verbally, or through nonverbal language, such as gestures or facial expressions. Furthermore, I use humor as an umbrella term for all genres, phenomena, or concepts associated with it, such as the ridiculous, the comic, the funny, farce, satire, parody, mockery, etc.

Political humor as genre

For my purposes, I further define the type of humor, which is the focus of this dissertation, as *political humor*. That is, humor referring to something political or used in a political context. Lichter, Baumgartner, and Morris define political humor as “any form of communication that alludes to something political and is intended to make people laugh” (2014, 8). *Encyclopedia of Humor Studies* offers a more detailed description of the genre: “Political humor, then, encompasses humor directed at or derived from politics, policies, political parties, institutions, and individuals involved in the political process, as well as humor used by politicians themselves” (Bippus 2014, 585).

In general, the social action of politicians using humor is to promote themselves, whereas ‘other people,’ such as artists, comedians, political commentators, and citizens, commonly take up the genre to criticize politicians and politics (Tsakona and Popa 2011, 5). To this, one might add that political humor need not always be critical. For example, the satirical news website *The Onion* published an article in praise of Nelson Mandela in the wake of his death entitled “Nelson Mandela Becomes First Politician To Be Missed” (*The Onion* 2013). In fact, as the entry on “Political humor” in *Encyclopedia of Humor Studies* notes, political humor about politicians or politics may serve myriad functions such as, “exposing incompetence or immorality, defusing aggression or encouraging cooperation, critiquing ideology, or promoting common ground” (Bippus 2014, 585). Thus, political humor commonly targets moral shortcomings and weaknesses in order to destabilize the reigning powers.

The genre can take many forms, including parody, joke, satire, pun etc., and can take place in various settings, which also indicate its different forms. For instance, humor from politicians generally is found in political debates, interviews, campaigns, and speeches,

whereas humor about politics and politicians commonly is found in late night comedy television, cartoons, revues, satirical news, and graffiti (Tsakona and Popa 2011, 5).

Accordingly, this dissertation explores humorous communication, which is produced by comedians and takes place in political contexts, namely election campaigns. This communication is characterized by a variety of multimodal genres, that is, verbal, visual, and audiovisual, digital and non-digital. It moreover takes a number of forms, including—and most centrally—irony, parody, and satire. By taking up common campaign genres, such as the election meeting, the campaign website, the election promise, or the political ad, the comedians aim to expose moral weakness, incompetence, and contradictions relative to the conduct of politics. In other words, they employ humor as a rhetorical strategy in the political domain (the election campaign) for attacking politicians and the conventions of politics and election campaigning—an attack that especially manifests in the form of parodic uptakes of the election promise. Furthermore, and importantly, they also use humor simply to entertain.

Defining political humor as a central genre in this dissertation also highlights an inherent and significant *incongruity* in the notion between ‘serious’ and ‘funny:’ Generally, politics is considered a serious matter, which is at odds with the funny matter of humor, primarily intended to raise laughter. The use of humor in relation to politics, in other words, is a deviation from norms that violates our expectations. As I will elaborate on, incongruity has long been recognized as a source of laughter (see “Major theories of humor”). In fact, there is general agreement in humor studies that incongruity of some kind is the basis of all humor (Weaver 2011, 18).

Understanding political humor as incongruous by nature helps explain the critical function it may serve: By disrupting social order and pointing out incongruities in politics, political humor can serve to reveal discrepancies between how things are and how things should be. Humor can be used to expose, what is commonplace in politics or our everyday lives, and once having seen that, which we take for granted, we can start thinking about ways to change it. In the words of Critchley: “By producing a consciousness of contingency, humour can change the situation in which we find ourselves” (Critchley 2002, 10). Humor can make way for different perspectives on norms and conventions in politics and society more overall and may function as an instrument of criticism. Therefore, and in the words of Tsakona and Popa, this dissertation additionally understands political humor as a

rhetorical strategy or “communicative resource” serving the function of “spotting, highlighting, and attacking incongruities originating in political discourse and action” (Tsakona and Popa 2011, 6).

A final observation of relevance to understanding this dissertation’s cases relates to the interaction between politics, media, and humor, or entertainment, in contemporary society. Therefore, before I move to examine the three major theories of humor, I briefly go over key aspects of this phenomenon and how it relates to my case studies.

The mediatization, personalization, and celebrification of politics

A common observation today is that the rise of new media options has changed the way politics is conducted (see e.g., Corner & Pels 2003; van Zoonen 2005; Marsh, Hart, and Tindall 2010; Baym 2014). For example, Corner & Pels argue that due to the expanded opportunities for exposure provided by the media, modern mediated politics increasingly has become a matter of personality, style, and appearance of the politician (Corner and Pels 2003, 2). Broadly speaking, the focus of political communication has shifted from policies and political parties to the personalities of individual politicians and their representation of particular issues. The authors put the development as follows: “Consumerism, celebrity, and cynicism (or political indifference), thus together restructure the field for political representation and good citizenship, downplaying traditional forms of ideological and party-based allegiance, and foregrounding matters of aesthetics and style” (ibid, 7).

By consequence, politics increasingly has become commercialized and thus subject to the conventions of advertisement (Street 2004, 441). This shift provides a new frame for how political communication is conducted. Following this logic, politicians become salesmen of sorts and citizens become consumers ‘shopping’ between political views. Moreover, a main concern with the personalization of politics is that traditional political leadership is replaced with media celebrity, political substance with infotainment, and ideology with aesthetics (see e.g., Street 2004, 443; van Zoonen 2005, ch. 5). Alongside this shift in political communication, some of the boundaries between politics and the entertainment industry or pop culture have been dissolved.

Much research has been devoted to the increasingly blurred lines between the entertainment industry and politics today (see e.g., Jones 2010; Tsakona and Popa 2011; Baumgartner and Morris 2012; Lichter, Baumgartner, and Morris 2014; Baym and Jones

2013). For instance, Geoffrey Baym (2012) argues that the rapid technological development and the expansion of the Internet have meant an increase of media sources giving rise to so-called infotainment. News, politics, and entertainment have in effect become less distinguishable. Today, he writes, traditional news media commonly represents politics as a sport of winners and losers, or a drama between antagonists and protagonists. In turn, politicians have become skilled at playing their part through rehearsed sound bites and a carefully prepared style of speaking, acting, and looking. In sum: “Political journalism has fused with the logic of entertainment, and so too has politics become inseparable from show business” (29).

This mix of information and entertainment, politics and pop culture, is captured in yet another notion: celebrity politics. Literature on celebrity politics often focuses on questions such as “how the uses of show business and popular culture affect political practice” (Street 2012, 347). Street (2004) proposes two categories of celebrity politics or, as he also terms it, celebrity politicians: The first category includes elected politicians or nominated candidates who (i) either have gained celebrity status from their background in another field, show business or sport, for example, or (ii) ‘use’ celebrities by appearing with them on entertainment programs, for instance, to promote their public image and political viewpoints. Examples of celebrities-turned-politicians include Ronald Reagan, actor and former president of the USA, and Arnold Schwarzenegger, actor and governor (‘govenator’) of California.

The second category of celebrity politicians refers to celebrities, known from the entertainment industry or show business, who speak out on political matters and on behalf of groups and causes without running for office themselves (Street 2004, 437-438).¹³ British celebrity comedian Russell Brand’s turn to political activism as examined by Arthurs and Shaw (2016), is one such example (see also: Arthurs and Little 2016).

Thus, the phenomenon of comedians winning elections also may be seen in context of the development of modern political communication. The heavy influence of media and

¹³ Other typologies of celebrity politicians exist. For example, Marsh et al. (2010) suggest the following five categories: Celebrity advocate, Celebrity activist/endorser, Celebrity politician, Politician celebrity, and Politician who uses other’s celebrity (Marsh, Hart, and Tindall 2010, 327).

entertainment logics and the resulting emphasis on personality and style in the field of political communication entails that celebrities, such as comedians, have good odds at gaining favor. In general, show business seeks out charismatic and entertaining performers with colorful personalities, that is, people who in general stand out. Similarly, if politics merges with show business, political candidates with those characteristics will achieve the most attention and thus, generally speaking, be favored. In other words, this development offers an external frame that may help explain the success of two political anomalies such as Haugaard and Gnarr.

Moreover, the notion of celebrity politics also provides a perspective on the comedians' unusual elections, as both comedians also may be categorized as celebrities-turned-politicians: Although Haugaard was not a celebrity in Denmark when he started campaigning in 1979, he had become a famous actor and entertainer by the time of his election in 1994. Likewise, Gnarr was a famous comedian in Iceland at the time he ran for election. Since the rise of new media options took place after Haugaard's election in 1994, it seems that Haugaard, in some sense, was ahead of his time.

Major theories of humor

Across the disciplines, three prominent theories of humor dominate: the superiority theory, the incongruity theory, and the relief theory. Each theory presents various accounts of what causes laughter. The following sections go over some of the main ideas of these theories and highlight aspects that are of particular significance to the case studies. This review will help elucidate different aspects of the comedians' humorous election campaigns of use in the analytical work. But before proceeding with the outline, a few comments on the names of these three theories are in order:

'Superiority,' 'incongruity,' and 'relief' theories are theoretical categories that encompass a wide range of ideas, comments, and theories on humor and laughter made throughout history. Thus, the writings under scrutiny in each major theory are of a varying nature. For example, as Billig points out, Plato and Aristotle's reflections on laughter are not actual theories, but rather may be described as "somewhat scattered observations" (2005, 38). Moreover, some ideas or theorists may be characterized as belonging to more than one of the three major theories; Henri Bergson, for example, is sometimes considered a superiority theorist, though most commonly an incongruity theorist (Davis 2014, 78).

Thus, the thinkers in each category have been placed there, so to speak, as adherents of one or more of the three theories. These categories are, in other words, “not names adopted by thinkers consciously participating in traditions” (Morreall 2009, 9). Neither do they imply that adherents of these three major theories were in complete agreement on the specifics of the basis of laughter. For instance, Morreall stresses that thinkers associated with the idea of incongruity as the source of humor differed on several points relative to incongruity or contradiction and how these notions relate to laughter (ibid, 12). Referring to *the* incongruity theory therefore is potentially misleading. But, as he points out, the term has caught on and the incongruity theory is today “the most widely accepted account of humor in philosophy and empirical psychology” (ibid).

Keeping this in mind, the outline of the three theories takes the oldest theory, the superiority theory, as its point of departure.

Superiority theory

The first theory stipulates that laughter emerges from a feeling of superiority over other people. Recognizing the mistakes of others makes us feel superior to them, as their ignorance or wrongdoings prove them inferior to us. From the perspective of the superiority theory, our amusement displays hostility towards other people since we take pleasure in their misfortune (Billig 2005, 39; Morreall 1987, 129; Morreall 2009, 7). Historically, the superiority theory has its origin in ancient Greek philosophy, but it is chiefly coupled with the seventeenth century philosopher Thomas Hobbes (Billig 2005, 50). Hobbes extended Plato’s critique of laughter, which I expand on next, as expressing malice towards others. But contrary to Plato, who saw some use in laughter as a disciplinary instrument, Hobbes “put all laughter under suspicion” (ibid). His attempt at explaining what brought about laughter was part of his work on human psychology in his book from 1640, *Human Nature*. In his view, laughter was the result of “sudden glory” felt when we experience that we are better than others, for “men laugh at mischances and indecencies, wherein there lieth no wit or jest at all” (Hobbes 1999, 54).

Plato and Aristotle, however, were the first ones to associate laughter with aggression, and held that there was too much laughter in the world (Billig 2005, 40). In the dialogue *Philebus*, Plato unveils his suspicion towards laughter through Socrates in discussion with Philebus and Protarchus. The dialogue evolves around the question of

whether a life of pleasure is more desirable than a life based on wisdom. Socrates, of course, adheres to the latter. Moreover, in his view, our source of amusement was other people's vices, and self-ignorance in particular, and this made him suspicious of the kind of emotions comedy evoked (Plato 2001, 44). Thus, Plato's emphasis on the malice behind laughter, as reflected in this dialogue, suggests his adherence to the superiority theory.

Plato furthermore warns against laughter in his *Republic* as he finds that the amusement acts against "our most cherished rational desire" (Plato and Badiou 2013, pt. 606B). Too much laughter threatened to destabilize social order and therefore was to be avoided, unless it was used to uphold moral and discipline in the ideal state (ibid). Thus, laughter's justification to Plato, in the words of Jerry Palmer, "is that it can serve to educate wrongdoers by deriding them, but even then too much is morally inferior and vulgar" (Palmer 1994, 94).

Aristotle shared Plato's view on laughter as a kind of malice towards people and their shortcomings. In *Poetics*, he described comedy as "a *mimesis* of inferior persons," thereby implying that we are amused by people inferior to us, which makes our laughter derisive (Aristotle 1997, pt. 1449a). But whereas Plato only found uses of laughter as a disciplinary instrument, Aristotle also observed the uses of laughter for persuasive purposes in debates—an aspect to which I will return. Aristotle stressed, however, that the speaker applies tact when using humor so that he comes across as a gentleman, not a buffoon. A tactful speaker is, as he explains, someone who is witty, not vulgar, and provides audiences with "pause and amusement," but not buffoonish jokes (Aristotle 1998, Book IV, pt. 1128b). I also elaborate on this point later when considering humor in relation to decorum.

Buffoonery was, in other words, unworthy of a gentleman. Furthermore, in the eyes of Plato and Aristotle, it was linked to a lower form of comedy that was used to mock authority and philosophical truths, thus arousing "uneducated" laughter (Weaver 2011, 15; Billig 2005, 44). For example, Aristophanes' *The Clouds* used buffoonery and ridiculed Socrates as a high-minded sophist (ibid). The comedy thus is an example of ancient political humor targeting intellectual prowess, which served to undermine the authority of Socrates. Since Aristotle did not approve of this practice, he, as Simon Weaver notes, "did not investigate the persuasive potential of buffoonery" (2011, 15).

Some of the earliest examples and discussions of how humor can and should be used as a rhetorical strategy in a political context, that is, the public sphere, thus are found in ancient Greek writings. I will return to investigate the recommendations and warnings of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, in the section centering on humor as a rhetorical strategy.

Incongruity theory

The second major theory for understanding humor was developed in the 18th century. According to the incongruity theory, laughter is aroused when we experience the unexpected, and is the result of “a felt incongruity between what we know or expect to be the case, and what actually takes place in the joke, gag, jest or blague” (Critchley 2002, 3). Laughter thus is the result of an uptake text “taking its object as some other kind,” in Freadman’s words (2002, 40). Humor ruptures known patterns, like the punch line of a joke comes as a surprise. It reveals to the audience that they deliberately have been led in the wrong direction and the violation of the expected pattern brings about laughter (Billig 2005, 65).

Philosophers in the 18th century developed the new approach to laughter in reaction to Hobbes’ anti-social account of what elicits laughter (ibid, 57). Among other thinkers at the time, such as James Beattie and George Campbell, Francis Hutcheson formulated a critique of Hobbes in 1758. Hutcheson denied that one had to feel a “sudden glory” to laugh and that all laughter is a result of a comparison with ourselves to others (Morreall 2009, 9). Metaphors or simple word plays, for example, do not necessarily involve a feeling of superiority or comparison with others.

According to Morreall, the first to actually use the word ‘incongruity’ in relation to the study of humor was Beattie (ibid, 12). He wrote that laughter “seems to arise from the view of things incongruous united in the same assemblage” (qtd. in Morreall 2009, ibid). Immanuel Kant, a contemporary of Beattie, explained laughter as “*an affection arising from the sudden transformation of strained expectation into nothing*” (Kant 2007, 133, original emphasis). Later, in the 19th century, Søren Kierkegaard also described incongruity as a violation of expectations, though he uses the word “contradiction” instead (Kierkegaard 2013, 431; Morreall 2009, 11).

But not all incongruities are humorous, as Morreall moreover notes. Violations of expectations or patterns do not necessarily prompt laughter or a humorous response (Morreall 2009, 12-13). If the incongruity is too small it may not cause a reaction at all, and if it is too big it may cause a negative response such as fear or anxiety (Palmer 1994, 99). If I learn that a family member has died from a stroke of lightning, it is incongruous but not very funny. Thus, a humorous response to disruptions and deviations from norms entails an *enjoyment* of incongruity (Morreall 2014, 569).

The incongruity perspective is fruitful for the purposes of my analyses for two main reasons: First, it provides an overall frame for understanding and examining the cases. As established, incongruity is a defining feature of political humor—the type of humorous communication, which is the focus of this dissertation. Furthermore, the case studies also center on an essentially incongruous phenomenon, since comedians entering politics are political anomalies. More specifically, the analyses therefore will uncover a variety of incongruities in the comedians' uptakes of campaign genres that particularly manifest through their use of irony, parody, and satire—three notions to which I too will return. Incongruities thus surface in the case studies as generic violations: the comedians apply a serious genre (election campaign) and breach its conventions by not offering an actual political platform that may help voters decide how to vote, for example.

Second, the incongruous perspective provides a basis for understanding the critical or social function of humor in the cases. That is, how humor may function as criticism. Disrupting patterns, overstepping norms, or pointing out incongruities in life or society may not only be a source of laughter but also of critical thinking, as Critchley notes (Critchley 2002, 10). He explains that in order for a joke to be understood as such, it must treat a social phenomenon that people recognize in a form they recognize as a joke. If the joke-teller's interpretation of reality is not consistent with that of the audience, they miss the incongruity of the joke and probably will not find it funny. Hence, the social content and form of the joke must in some way match for the incongruity to show in the joke. In the words of Critchley: "The incongruities of humour both speak out of a massive congruence between joke structure and social structure, and speak against those structures by showing that they have no necessity" (ibid).

Thus, jokes play with words and form about social practices and established ideas in society. By offering an incongruous perspective on society jokes highlight that things could

be different—perhaps even improved. As such, the use of humor may serve a critical, social function. It can offer an alternative perspective by letting us “see the familiar defamiliarized, the ordinary made extraordinary and the real rendered surreal” (ibid).¹⁴

Relief theory

In the 19th century philosophers and thinkers developed the relief theory alongside the incongruity theory. But, as Morreall notes: “Of the three traditional theories of humor, the relief theory has found the least acceptance” (Morreall 2014, 568).

This theory explains laughter as “a release of nervous energy,” and was first formulated by Herbert Spencer in the essay “On the Physiology of Laughter” (Morreall 1987, 131). Spencer’s theory of laughter was, as the title indicates, grounded in physiology. It contends that nervous energy builds up in our nervous systems and laughing is a way to release this energy. Our emotions cause the accumulation of nervous energy, which we release in different ways; if scared, we run, if angry, we attack. But since laughing does not serve any useful purpose such as these, it must mean that it “is *just* a release of energy” (ibid, original emphasis). Spencer furthermore held that laughter was a reaction to an unexpected occurrence, thereby building on the incongruity theory (Billig 2005, 99).

Thus, in the early version of the relief theory, as presented by Spencer and others, laughter is neither associated with malice nor incongruity, but is taken purely as a release of surplus energy (Morreall 2009, 17). In the later and most well known version of the relief theory presented by Sigmund Freud, laughter is less innocently coupled with repressed feelings of both aggression and lust (ibid).

Freud’s *Der Witz* (1905) was part of a broader theoretical project, which aimed at revealing the significance of the unconscious to how people think and act (Billig 2005, 144). In the first analytic section of the book, Freud outlines a number of joke techniques

¹⁴ This idea is also captured in Kenneth Burke’s ‘perspective by incongruity’—a rhetorical mechanism of change, which operates by coupling incongruous forms to formulate a new perspective. Burke clarifies that it is “[a] method for gauging situations by verbal ‘atom cracking.’ That is, a word belongs by custom to a certain category—and by rational planning you wrench it loose and metaphorically apply it to a different category” (Burke 1984, 308). As such, perspective by incongruity operates as a way to disrupt existing linguistic order to open up new perspectives and ways of thinking about a given situation. This “atom cracking” and disruption of accepted social order can be generated through the use of a variety of linguistic forms such as irony and sarcasm (Jasinski 2001, 435).

and makes a distinction between innocent and tendentious jokes (Freud 1963, 90). An innocent joke “is an end in itself.” A tendentious joke, in turn, serves a purpose (ibid). The tendentious joke, he writes, “is either a *hostile* joke (serving the purpose of aggressiveness, satire, or defence) or an *obscene* joke (serving the purpose of exposure)” (ibid, 97, original emphasis). Most jokes are tendentious, Freud notes, because these are about topics such as sex, xenophobia, or other taboos that society forces us to repress. Thus, these jokes function as a pressure valve of the energy we spend on repressing such taboos, which is released in laughter.

A synonym for the relief theory is the notion of *comic relief* (Attardo 2014b, 154). Comic relief may be understood as the use of humor in non-humorous situations, texts, films, etc. to relieve tension (ibid). As such, humor can provide relief from the somber narrative of a story, the stress of life, or the lassitude of a classroom. For example, Meyer points out that it may be advantageous for a speaker to tell a joke in the beginning of a speech to relieve tension in the audience, especially if the speaker knows his or her message is likely to be badly received (Meyer 2000, 312). Humorous remarks can “make the situation seem more elastic, more manageable, by showing that difficulties are not so overwhelming after all” (ibid). To this one might add that jokes also often function to reduce the speaker’s own nervousness.

Similarly, the comedians and their humorous election campaigns may have provided comic relief in a stressful time. Mudslinging is a common characteristic of election campaigns, as tension builds in the weeks leading up to an election. The comedians’ incongruous campaigns might have served the social action of breaking the intensity of such counter-productive practices. Thus, their electoral success also may have been associated with their ability to release tension in society.

Humor as a rhetorical strategy: recommendations, warnings, and manifestations

Following the outline of dominant ideas and aspects of humor origin, this section proceeds to develop some of these ideas and to investigate central notions that especially relate to the use of humor as a rhetorical strategy in the public realm, that is, to political humor. It is divided into three subsections: The first subsection reviews how humor may function as a persuasive means, both in ancient and modern rhetorical writings. The second section centers on the relationship between humor and decorum—a notion of

relevance to the investigation of how the comedians use humor to distort and thus violate the election campaign genre. Such genre violations primarily manifest in the form of irony, parody, and satire. Operational definitions of these three notions therefore are offered in the third and concluding section of the chapter.

Recommendations: humor as a persuasive means

As mentioned, Aristotle recognized that the ability to raise laughter could serve persuasive purposes. In the third book of *Rhetoric*, Aristotle repeats the sophist Gorgias' advice in a short passage on the uses of wit and jest as persuasive means in debates: "Gorgias rightly said that one should spoil the opponents' seriousness with laughter and their laughter with seriousness" (Aristotle 2007, pt. 1419b).¹⁵ In the same passage, Aristotle furthermore mentions "the number of forms of humor," which he apparently had "stated in the *Poetics*" and "of which some are appropriate for a gentleman to use and some not."¹⁶ This suggests that he regarded jokes or jests or the like as useful devices in oratory—though only insofar as the use of such devices did not exceed the limits of decorum.

Aristotle's pragmatic view on humor as a rhetorical tool in oratory also is reflected in the work of Cicero. A dialogue in the second book of *De Oratore* is dedicated an examination of the use of humor in public speaking, including practical techniques and philosophical questions concerning the nature of humor and the ethical implications of its use.¹⁷ In this dialogue it is soon established that wit and the art of jesting cannot be taught (Cicero 1942, Book II, pt. 216). Still, the participants wish to discuss the source and nature of the laughable, and they ask Caesar to share his knowledge on the subject "as he

¹⁵ I rely on the most recent translation of *Rhetoric* from 2007 by George A. Kennedy. However, a note on the translation: As will be seen, Kennedy writes 'humor' in the translation, that is, a modern notion, as previously established. The imprecise translation is also found in Kennedy's earlier edition of *On Rhetoric: a theory of civic discourse* from 1991 (See Aristotle 1991).

¹⁶ It is widely assumed that there existed a second and now lost book of *Poetics*, as Kennedy notes.

¹⁷ I rely on the Loeb Classical Library edition and translation of *On the orator* by E. W. Sutton and H. Rackham from 1942. As seen in Kennedy's translations, Sutton and Rackham also include the anachronistic notion 'humor.' As does J.S. Watson in his later translation from 1986 (See Cicero 1986).

recognizes such power and value in pleasantry and humour” (ibid, pt. 231). Caesar clarifies that raising laughter is part of a speaker’s ‘vocabulary’ on the following grounds:

merriment naturally wins goodwill for its author; and everyone admires acuteness, which is often concentrated in a single word, uttered generally in repelling, though sometimes in delivering an attack; and it shatters or obstructs or makes light of an opponent, or alarms or repulses him; and it shows the orator himself to be a man of finish, accomplishment and taste; and, best of all, it relieves dullness and tones down austerity, and, by a jest or a laugh, often dispels distasteful suggestions not easily weakened by reasoning’s. (ibid, pt. 236)

Thus, arousing laughter can serve a variety of functions that may benefit the speaker’s ethos, as it could reflect his intelligence (*phronesis*) and create a pleasant atmosphere in the audience (*eunoia*), thereby strengthening the bond between speaker and audience.¹⁸ Laughter may also serve to weaken the opponent and thus benefit the speaker’s purpose. Some of these functions will be illustrated in the case studies. As mentioned, they primarily manifest in the form of irony, satire, and parody.

The rest of Cicero’s dialogue is a long outline of jokes and examples illustrating how various rhetorical figures, such as assonance or the metaphor, may be used to raise laughter. A similar outline of practical techniques by means of topics of argument or tropes, for example, also concludes Quintilian’s chapter on laughter in the sixth book of *Institutio Oratoria*. His work clearly is inspired by Cicero’s thoughts on humor in public speaking as well as the ancient Greeks, as he reiterates many observations made before but also adds his own.¹⁹

Although a challenge, Quintilian is engaged with introducing methods of teaching students how to arouse laughter (Quintilian 2002, Book VI, ch. 3, pt. 15-17). He therefore attempts to approach the topic systematically and begins by describing different names for the topic followed by the quality of the topic. Adding to Cicero’s division of verbal humor

¹⁸ In this dissertation, I rely on Aristotle’s definition of ethos and his classification of its three dimensions, i.e., elements of importance to a speaker’s credibility: practical wisdom (*phronesis*), good moral character or virtue (*arête*), and goodwill (of the audience) (*eunoia*) (Aristotle 2007, Book II, pt. 1378a. See also Book I, pt. 1356a).

¹⁹ As with Cicero, I rely on the Loeb Classical Library edition and most recent translation from 2002 of *The Orator’s Education* by Donald A. Russell.

into form and matter,²⁰ Quintilian identifies three practical applications “for we seek to raise a laugh either (1) at the expense of others, or (2) at our own, or (3) out of neutral circumstances” (ibid, pt. 23). In the first category, laughter serves to weaken the opponent; in the second, laughter serves to strengthen the speaker’s own position; and in the third, laughter affects neither party and is brought about by a play with words.

Thus, Quintilian points to many of the same functions formulated by Cicero. Such pragmatic advice indicates the constructive approach to humor shared by the Roman rhetoricians, and also seen in Aristotle’s work. Raising laughter could be a powerful, rhetorical strategy to target the opponent and consolidate the bond between speaker and audience, for instance. A speaker would do well to learn this skill—and a teacher would do well learning how to teach it.

Many recent studies echo this view on humor as a rhetorical resource. For example, Sean Zwagerman (2010) approaches jokes as indirect speech acts, that is, speech that indirectly “performs” an act. Since humor often involves a play with meanings and words, it can function as a performative strategy that in an indirect manner may create “consubstantiality,” as Kenneth Burke coins it (Zwagerman 2010, 31). John C. Meyer (2000) moreover offers a particularly useful catalogue of humor functions, which at least in part explain why humor is “so rewarding and so influential” (310-311). These functions are: identification, clarification, enforcement, and differentiation.

Meyer extrapolates these functions from the three major theories of humor origin (superiority theory, incongruity theory, and relief theory) and contends that these theories do not sufficiently account for humor’s effects in messages. “Their dilemma when explaining rhetorical uses of humor arises when each seeks to explain all instances of humor” (Meyer 2000, 316). Rather than focusing on *causes* of humor, Meyer focuses on *uses* of humor, and argues for “an effects-based taxonomy of humor” in addition to these theories (ibid).

Briefly put, humor can help create *identification* between speaker and audience, or *clarify* the rhetor’s message. A rhetor can also *enforce* norms through use of humor, as is

²⁰ In *De Oratore*, Cicero makes an original distinction, not seen in Aristotle’s work, between two kinds of verbal humor: humor based on matter, and humor based on form. The former kind employs “facts” such as anecdotes and caricatures, the latter a play with “words” (Cicero 1942, Book II, pt. 240 pp.). The most amusement, though, is brought about “whenever laughter is excited by the union of the two” (ibid, pt. 248).

the third humor function, or use humor as a means to *differentiate* him/herself from opponents. Whereas the identification and clarification functions tend to rhetorically unify speakers and audiences, the enforcement and differentiation functions tend to divide (one group of) speakers and audiences from others. The case studies will expand on these functions.

Warnings: humor and decorum

A shared observation in ancient rhetoric was that humor could be rhetorically efficacious as long as its use was decorous, i.e., fitted to the specific situation. *Decorum* is a multifaceted concept that has been defined in a variety of ways throughout the history of rhetorical theory. It is often characterized in terms of appropriateness and associated with terms such as ‘to prepon’ (from Greek: “it is fitting”), suitability, or propriety. It is also related to the notion of *kairos* (“the opportune moment”), that is, appropriateness in regard to time (Hariman 2001, 199; Jasinski 2001, 146). According to *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric*, decorum is rooted in the idea “that speech will not be effective unless it fits in with the characteristic features of the speaker, subject, audience, occasion, or medium” (Hariman 2001, 199).

Relative to the topic of laughter, the notion of decorum commonly is introduced as advice against raising laughter that is inappropriate for a gentleman. Instead, restraint is emphasized. For example, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle underlines that speakers should not succumb to vulgarity: “Now they who exceed in the ridiculous are judged to be Buffoons and Vulgar, catching at it in any and every way and at any cost, and aiming rather at raising laughter than at saying what is seemly [...]” (Aristotle 1998, pt. 1128a). In Cicero’s dialogue, Caesar makes a similar distinction between an orator and a buffoon, namely that “we people speak with good reason, not just to be thought funny, but to gain some benefit, while those others are jesting from morning to night, and without any reason at all” (Cicero 1942, Book II, pt. 247).

In other words, raising laughter in a speech must serve some purpose and not *be* the purpose of the speech. Speakers should therefore apply tact and restraint when joking—an advice repeated in several variations. For example, as Caesar proceeds to discuss the limits and objects of the laughable, he stresses that restraint, most importantly, must be applied when using humor, so that the speaker does not sink to buffoonery or uses inappropriate

language (ibid, pt. 239). Joking may not exceed the limits of decorum. Quintilian expresses similar concerns as his predecessors for decorum as he discusses the type of jokes and jests suitable for a speaker. A speaker should avoid exaggerated gestures and obscene language, and he should never seek to hurt, he writes (Quintilian 2002, Book VI, ch. 3, pt. 27-32).

In light of these warnings against buffoonery and considerations concerning the behavior of the speaker, it is interesting to note that a comedian is someone who precisely does aim at raising laughter and “to be thought funny” rather than maintaining the rules of decorum and “at saying what is seemly.” As the case studies reveal, Haugaard and Gnarr are far from always seemly. Their uptakes of common election genres reflect many breaches of decorum and generic conventions in the form of obscene language or images, for example.

The warnings to mind decorum are also rooted in the concern that the speaker does not compromise himself and thereby hurt his cause. Cicero, for example, stresses that the speaker takes special care of not mocking an object or person for which the audience has sympathy (Cicero 1942, Book II, pt. 237). Likewise, Quintilian notes that insulting the opponent as part of an attack is not necessarily inappropriate, but first the speaker must consider “who is saying what, in what Cause, before what court, and against whom” (Quintilian 2002, Book VI, ch. 3, pt. 28). If the speaker targets the wrong object, person, or group of people at an inappropriate place and time, he runs the risk of harming his own respectability and authority (ibid, pt. 30-32). Quintilian’s closing remark is therefore: “What a good man says, he will always say without endangering his dignity or modesty. We pay too dear for the laugh if it costs us our integrity” (ibid, pt. 35).

Such reflections on humor and decorum illustrate a normative approach to the use humor: Ancient rhetoricians were not only engaged with how laughter *could* be raised, but also how and when it *should* be raised. Contrary to their urgings to apply restraint when using humor, however, the case studies will show that the comedians do not hold back and thus deviate from rhetorical recommendations for how to use humor as a persuasive means. Of course, following such advice is no guarantee for persuasive success, but it implies that if a speaker acts differently it is more likely he will fail. Thus, as a rhetorical strategy, humor may prove unstable, or, as *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric* concludes in brief, “a risky enterprise” (Sloane 2001, 359).

Manifestations: irony, satire, and parody

As mentioned, political humor takes numerous forms. In the case studies, it primarily manifests as irony, parody, and satire. An examination of these three notions therefore concludes this chapter.

Quintilian formulated the simplest and most general definition of irony in *Institutio Oratoria* as a trope “in which meaning and the words are *contrary*” (2002, Book VIII, ch. 6, pt. 54). One can detect irony “either by delivery, by the character of the speaker, or by the nature of the subject” (ibid). Linda Hutcheon offers a longer explanation of irony in *Irony’s Edge* (1994), which she describes as “a semantically complex process of relating, differentiating, and combining said and unsaid meanings—and in so doing with some evaluative edge” (Hutcheon 1994, 89). It is the fact “that irony can be used as a weapon” that makes Hutcheon refer to its “edge” (ibid, 9-10).

In his classic work *A Rhetoric of Irony* (1974) Wayne C. Booth ponders how we come to ‘know’ an ironist’s intentions, that is, how do readers decide, when something is meant ironically? Accordingly, he proposes a distinction between two forms of irony, stable and unstable irony, as a way to explain how readers interpret something as ironic—or perhaps fail to. Stable irony is intended, i.e., not accidental, and clearly invites the audience to read between the lines (Booth 1974, 6). Furthermore, stable irony involves a limited number of “reconstructed meanings,” as Booth explains: “once a reconstruction of meaning has been made, the reader is not then invited to undermine it with further demolitions” (ibid). Thus, the primary difference between stable and unstable irony concerns how many times one must reconstruct the meaning: In stable irony, the audience does not need to reconstruct the meaning more than once; in unstable irony, the audience is unsure, or at least less sure, if they have arrived at the intended meaning. Therefore, in unstable irony, the ironist’s intention is often unclear.

Booth also presents five clues to stable irony, that is, clues to determine whether or not irony is at play: (1) Straightforward warnings in the author’s own voice; (2) Known Error Proclaimed; (3) Conflicts of Facts within the Work; (4) Clashes of Style; and (5) Conflicts of Belief (ibid, 53-76). The case chapters will elaborate on these clues as they are applied in the analytical work.

In her article “Reporteren og hans persona: Selv-ironi som retorisk strategi” (“The reporter and his persona: self-irony as rhetorical strategy”) (2003), Christine Isager

couples the notions of stable/unstable irony with ethos when examining and comparing the ironic self-representation of two reporters in two different press articles. She analyzes how the reporters' self-ironic personas affect their ethos: Briefly put, if their use of irony is stable their ethos is stable, and if their use of irony is unstable, their ethos is dynamic.²¹ However, whether or not the reader ascribes the reporter a high or low ethos depends on how they evaluate his persona.

Relating Isager's analytical approach to my case studies, the comedians likely will be ascribed a high ethos (resulting in votes) if the audience finds their political persona's²² performance entertaining, informative, or in other ways rhetorically successful. As such the comedians have proven capable of representing themselves in a way that mirrors the audience's values or opinions. Conversely, the comedians will be ascribed a low ethos if the audience disapproves in some way of their political persona or finds it trivial. In this case, the comedians have proven unfit or incapable of catching the audience's attention, perhaps by not seizing the right moment. Thus, how the comedians represent themselves as comedians and political candidates reflect their rhetorical abilities (Isager 2003, 22).

In her work, 20 years after Booth, Hutcheon also introduces markers of irony. In contrast to Booth, whose point of focus was the ironist's *intention*—how readers arrive at the intended meaning—Hutcheon's point of focus is the *reception* of irony. Intended or not, the reader has to recognize a mark of irony as precisely this, a mark of irony, before it becomes such. Accordingly, she stresses, "nothing is an irony signal in and of itself" (Hutcheon 1994, 159).

²¹ The understanding of ethos as a dynamic concept comes from James C. McCroskey. He defines ethos as "the attitude toward a source of communication held at a given time by a receiver" (McCroskey 1997, 87). Hence, ethos may vary from recipient to recipient and from time to time, as it depends on the evaluation of the sender. McCroskey therefore operates with three categories of ethos: 'Initial ethos' refers to the audience's attitude toward a source prior to the rhetorical act. 'Derived ethos' depends on the content and delivery of a message. 'Terminal ethos' is the sum of initial and derived ethos and is determined at the end of the rhetorical act (ibid, 94-97).

²² Persona is to be understood in the broad sense as a (social) role or character. Figuratively speaking, the notion of persona highlights the divide between the performed role and the private self—or, put differently, between who the rhetor is and how he chooses to represent himself (Cherry 1988, 257).

She distinguishes between meta-ironic markers and structural markers. The distinction rests upon the function each of the markers have. The meta-ironic markers function as “warning-signals,” i.e., cues suggesting that irony is at play, but they “do not so much constitute irony in themselves as signal the possibility of ironic attribution” (Hutcheon 1994, 154). Such markers could be gestural, phonic, and graphic (ibid, 155-156). The graphic markers take form of, e.g., quotation-, exclamation- and question marks, parentheses, and italics. The structural markers, in turn, function to signify and structure the context that allows the said and the unsaid to come together and bring about irony (ibid). Hutcheon lists five “generally agreed-upon” categories of structural markers: (1) various changes of register; (2) exaggeration/understatement; (3) contradiction/incongruity; (4) literalization/simplification; and (5) repetition/echoic mimicry (ibid, 156). As with Booth’s clues the case chapters will apply and elaborate on these markers.

Some of these markers overlap with Booth’s clues to irony. For example, “various changes of register” is similar to Booth’s “Clashes of style,” as they both reflect shifts in style, such as shifts in vocabulary, sociolects, or dialects (Booth 1974, 68; Hutcheon 1994, 156). Furthermore, Hutcheon’s “contradiction/incongruity” overlap with Booth’s third and fifth clues: “Conflicts of Fact within the Work” and “Conflicts of Belief.” But since the authors differ in their perspectives and aims, they together offer a rich understanding of irony.

In an earlier work, *A Theory of Parody* (1985), Hutcheon maintains that irony always is an element found in parody and she classifies parody as “a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text” (Hutcheon 1985, 6). Otherwise expressed, a parody does not necessarily target the object it imitates. The target could be something other than the object being parodied.

Hutcheon also defines parody as “repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity” (Hutcheon 1985, 6). The critical distance between the parodied text (in the background) and the new, parodic text (in the foreground) often is marked by irony (ibid, 32). That is, an ironic play with conventions or an ironic contrasting of objects, which often is signaled through “a stylistic confrontation” (ibid, 8). Similarly, Booth observes that “[t]he most obvious use of stylistic clues in stable irony is found in

parody, the mocking imitation by one author of another author's style" (Booth 1974, 71). Often parodies not only imitate style, but also opinions or attitudes (ibid, 72).

Thus, parody must necessarily have an object to imitate. It is therefore what you might call an *uptake genre*: For a parody to become a parody it must take up an object, for instance, another genre or a person. This point is central to the analyses, since the comedians take up a wide range of genres associated with election campaigning, such as the political ad and the election meeting.

In order to detect parody, one may observe a wide range of parodic techniques or markers of parody, many of which overlap with Hutcheon's and Booth's markers of irony. For example, Margaret A. Rose (1993) catalogues a list of parody signals, which includes: changes to the syntax or the choice of words, changes in tense, persons, sociolect, or idiolect, or changes to the message of an absurd, seemingly meaningless, ironic, or satiric kind, just to mention a few examples (37). Additionally, in his article, "Political Parody and Public Culture," Robert Hariman (2008) lists a number of parodic practices, which he characterizes as "various combinations of imitation and alteration: direct quotation, alternation of words, textual rearrangement, substitution of subjects or characters, shifts in diction, shifts in class, shifts in magnitude, etc." (250). Many of these forms and techniques will be exemplified in the analytical work.

Like parody, satire "always involves irony," and often it involves parody too, as Peter L. Berger further explains: "Like the martial arts, [satire] always uses the adversary's strengths against himself and thus turns them into weaknesses. A particularly effective version of this is parody, in which the adversary's own words are used against him" (Berger 1997, 160). Hutcheon moreover observes that parody and satire often have been confused, likely because "[s]atire frequently uses parodic art forms for either expository or aggressive purposes" (Hutcheon 1985, 43). A key difference between the two genres is, however, that unlike satire, parody does not necessarily involve an attack or a moral judgment.

Berger defines satire in broad terms as "the deliberate use of the comic for purposes of attack" (ibid, 157). In doing so, he relies on Northrop Frye's definition of satire in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957). A central feature of satire is aggression, which also is emphasized by Frye's widely cited characterization of satire as "militant irony" (Frye 1973,

223). He clarifies the relationship between satire and irony as follows: “Sheer invective or name-calling (“flyting”) is satire in which there is relatively little irony: on the other hand, whenever a reader is not sure what the author’s attitude is or what his own is supposed to be, we have irony with relatively little satire” (ibid).

Satire with little irony corresponds with Elliott’s recital of words often used to describe satire, namely as “cutting, blistering, biting, killing, stinging, stabbing, scorching, searing, burning, withering, flaying, annihilating [...] sharp, barbed, poisonous, malignant, deadly, vitriolic, and so on” (Elliott 1961, 281). But, as Frye on the other hand also points out, satire need not always be aggressive. The case studies will illustrate both an aggressive and milder form of satire.

Frye points out several elements fundamental to satire: Satire involves (1) a set of moral standards, at least implicitly conveyed; (2) a use of humor based on fantasy, the grotesque, or the absurd; and (3) an object of attack. Satirists commonly assume the moral high ground and are in some sense driven to action—to act against an injustice of some kind. “Thus satirists write in winters of discontent,” as one scholar puts it (Quintero 2007, 1). Satire requires some degree of fantasy to present a content, which the audience will also identify as grotesque or absurd. It is through the selection of these absurdities that the satirist conveys his or her moral norms. Moreover, satire always has a target—an object of attack—, unlike irony that is not necessarily directed at anyone or anything. To attack, however, requires that the satirist and his or her audience both find the object of attack undesirable. Therefore, the use of satire generally has been aimed at exposing moral, social, and intellectual shortcomings, as Conal Condren notes in *Encyclopedia of Humor Studies* (Condren 2014, 1069).

Condren furthermore observes that satire today is commonly understood as “humorous means to a moral end” (ibid). He distinguishes between two forms of satire: general and personal. The former denotes satire used to uncover broad moral vices (hypocrisy, greed, corruption etc.). The latter kind designates satire used to expose and demean particular people, groups, or institutions. These are often society’s most powerful figures, belonging to the political or intellectual elite, for example (ibid, 1070-1071). The social function of satire thus corresponds with the social function of political humor. In fact, to criticize is the most common social action of satire, or, as Ian Reilly phrases it, “the kernel of satire’s broader project” (Reilly 2010, 34). This observation is also reflected in the

types of roles the satirist typically is thought to embody, for example, “civic watchdog, sneering cynic, mocking or indignant observer, and social outcast” (Gowers 2012).

3. Jacob Haugaard: a buffoon in Parliament



Photo by: Jens Dresling/Ritzau Scanpix.

Introduction to case study

The seventh time was the charm: In 1994, Danish comedian, entertainer, and musician Jacob Haugaard made history when he was elected a Member of Parliament. For more than a decade, from 1979 to 1994, Haugaard had been the main candidate for the curious-sounding political movement “Sammenslutningen af Bevidst Arbejdssky Elementer” (“the Union of Conscientiously Work-shy Elements”) (hereafter, SABAE). On the night of his election, Haugaard compared himself with a court jester while claiming, “I am the one who will say the things that no one else dares, and I’m sure that the people who have voted for me have done so as a protest against the current politicians, who all say the same things only with different words” (Spærhage Hansen 2011). But as Haugaard’s campaign manager, Paul Smith, reveals in a later interview, Haugaard was never supposed to get elected (Øvig Knudsen 2001). So how did he manage to anyway?

The case study starts out with a brief introduction to the Danish election system and proceeds to describe Haugaard, his background, and his affiliation with SABAE. Understanding the foundation of SABAE and Haugaard’s involvement with the political movement calls for knowing the political and cultural landscape of the time, particularly the radical development of the left wing in Denmark in the 1960s and 1970s. Following this description, I expand on the founders of SABAE founders and its avant-garde profile.

The chapter continues to characterize SABAE’s seven election campaigns overall and analyze a main genre of their campaigns: the election promise. Another central aspect of Haugaard’s election campaigns was his interpersonal communication with voters, which primarily took place in the form of numerous untraditional election events over the years. Based on press coverage of these events, the chapter describes and examines a selection of them in order to uncover how Haugaard took up the genre of interpersonal campaigning and how these events may have contributed to his popularity and consequently his electoral success.

Following this analysis, the chapter examines SABAE’s seven election posters. Comparing SABAE’s election posters to the characteristics of the genre similarly aids our understanding of how Haugaard violated the genre, represented himself as a political candidate, and how SABAE’s campaigns developed over the years.

The chapter is concluded with a brief description of Haugaard’s election and election term.

The Danish election system

The Danish Parliament, *Folketinget*, consists of 179 members. Denmark elects 175 of these members, and Greenland and the Faroe Islands send two members each. At an election, Denmark is divided into three regions, which are further divided into 10 large constituencies. This is done to ensure a fair representation of all parts of the country at the election. There are two types of seats to win in the Danish Parliament: a constituency seat (135 members) or a supplementary seat (40 members). The constituency seats are distributed between the parties in accordance with the amount of votes the parties receive in the 10 individual large constituencies (*storkredse*). These mandates are therefore geographically attached to the constituency, in which the candidate runs for Parliament, and are not affected by the party's result on national level. When the constituency seats have been distributed, the supplementary seats remain. The final 40 mandates relates to the amount of votes a party received on national level. If a candidate did not win a constituency seat s/he still has a chance to win a supplementary seat if the candidate's party did well in the country overall (Folketinget 2016).

Haugaard ran for Parliament in the constituency of Aarhus as an independent candidate seven times and eventually won a constituency seat in 1994. Only few candidates without a party affiliation run for Parliament, as it requires many personal votes to win a seat—and, as mentioned, besides Haugaard only one other candidate in the history of Danish politics has run independently and won.

Jacob Haugaard: background and affiliation with SABAE

Haugaard reached national fame in the 1980s as part of a comedy duo with another Danish comedian, Finn Nørbygaard. The comedians became a success with their act as “Finn & Jacob” in entertainment programs on national television and TV commercials for “Squash,” a Danish soft drink (Jersild 1994). Furthermore, they wrote and starred in two movies (*Jydekompaniet 1* and *Jydekompaniet 3*)²³ (Christensen 1999, 109-113). Their sense of humor is perhaps best characterized as silly, mild, and folksy, appealing to families and, in general, a wide audience. On the whole, Haugaard was an active figure in the entertainment industry from the middle of 1980s through the 1990s. Besides performing as a comedian and actor on television, he also produced radio programs, wrote songs, and performed as a musician (ibid, 122-125, 135-142). Today, Haugaard is still a public figure and regularly appears on entertainment programs or gives interviews, particularly about his time as Member of Parliament.

Before Haugaard became famous all over Denmark, however, he was rather *infamous* in his native part of the country, Aarhus (a city in the Western part of Denmark). In the late 1970s, Haugaard was, in his own words, enjoying the middle of his twenties living the life of a loafer (Haugaard 1999, 9). He lived in a gypsy caravan, free of rent and responsibility, and moved around depending on where anything exciting was taking place. His home was always open to anyone and everyone: his friends, straying drug addicts, and homeless people (Christensen 1999, 58). He constantly sought attention and was known for his drunken and disruptive behavior at concerts, as Haugaard’s brother, Jan Haugaard jocularly says in a TV interview: “Everybody hated this bastard, who arrived with his wooden flute and wanted to play along” (Uhrbrandt 1995). Moreover, his extensive use of alcohol and marijuana often got him into fights, and his performances with his punk rock band *Sofamania* often involved him taking off his clothes. As the opening line in a 1984 article in a local newspaper establishes: “He likes to shock” (*Herning Folkeblad* 1984).

Back then, besides making music, Haugaard was unemployed and his main income came from the social welfare office (Christensen 1999, 43). Apart from a higher preparatory exam (a form of high school) he is uneducated. He spent four months working on a cruise ship, and briefly studied at the college of social education. He has done various

²³ They decided against making *Jydekompaniet 2* in the belief that the sequel always fails (Christensen 1999, 123).

kinds of unskilled work, such as painting radiators (*Aarhus Stiftstidende* 1979), and he furthermore worked as a cleaner at a mental institution (Uhrbrandt 1995). In his own words, his affiliation with the hospital was known to many in the area and seen as a fitting parallel to his attention-seeking, drunken, and borderline insane behavior (Haugaard 1999, 10-11).

This behavior was exactly what attracted one of the central figures of SABAE, Paul Smith, on the evening of the movement's one-year anniversary in 1978, where the two men first were acquainted. On this occasion, Haugaard and Sofamania were hired to perform as part of the entertainment. Haugaard did so wearing only a vest made of mint-green synthetic leather and nothing else. He furthermore disrupted the evening's speeches, harassed the newly appointed honorary member of SABAE, and drove a moped around on the dance floor (Øvig Knudsen 2001). Smith explains in the biography that it was because of Haugaard's madness that he later that evening asked him to run for Parliament for SABAE. Without knowing what he was getting himself into, Haugaard agreed on the spot (Christensen 1999, 72).

SABAE

Historical and political landscape

Overall, the 1970s in Denmark marks a decade of economic and political turbulence. Huge debt problems exacerbated by the 1970's international oil crises led to high inflation and increasing unemployment as well as parliamentary instability. Stagnation and inflation posed a challenge to the country's financial policy and resulted in frequent elections and new formations of Government (Schädler Andersen et al. 2010, 5:35-37, 917). This time period was also influenced, both politically and culturally, by events taking place around the turn of the decade, specifically the years from 1968-1972 (Gundelach 1988, 222-23). An important event was the student revolt in 1968 that marked the beginning of the youth rebellion these years. To understand the impact of the rebellion, it is necessary to take one step further back in time.

From the late 1950s to the early 1970s Danish society underwent radical change; Denmark became a welfare state and an affluent society (Schädler Andersen et al. 2012, 4:11). The increased economic resources meant growth in the public sector and public education became more standardized which gave rise to a new youth culture that was

more self-aware, and better informed of global events—also by virtue of the arrival of the television. News of the world now reached people in their homes and the young generation in Denmark was heavily influenced, politically and culturally, by the changes taking place in other countries. Like students all over Europe, students in Denmark protested against the university leadership in the student revolt of 1968. Like in the US, people in Denmark started to demonstrate against the war in Vietnam. The youth rebellion brought politics ‘out in the open’ and into the streets, and manifested in the emergence of political and social movements promoting peace and women’s rights, for example (Gundelach 1988, 223–225).

Overall, the 1960s and early 1970s signified a break with conventions and traditions. To many, the Vietnam War came to represent the ruling imperialism and repressive militarism in the USA and the Western world on the whole. The quest for making the world a better place made many turn to socialism and Marxist theories—in opposition to capitalism and imperialism—and led them to the extreme-left wing (Holm and Smith 2003, 13). The historian Thomas Ekman Jørgensen characterizes the growth of the left wing in those years in terms of radicalization; the radical left wing was consumed with finding the source of all problems in the world, removing the source, and creating the perfect classless society (Jørgensen 2003, 74). The left wing did not believe that the upper middle class would peacefully hand over the power and succumb to socialism, so the capitalistic State had to be overthrown, even crushed, through violent revolution by a united working class (Plum 1998, 48–49). The great ideal was Lenin and the October Revolution, which served as proof of the real possibility of revolution (ibid, 86).

In these years, the 1960s and 1970s, a multitude of small left wing parties emerged in Denmark and attempted to gain influence in Parliament or through extra parliamentary activities. But the left wing parties were characterized by internal conflicts and fractions; Maoists, Leninists, Trotskyists, and anarchists shifted between joining existing parties and organizing themselves in various extreme-left political groups and avant-garde parties with a Marxist and/or Leninist stamp (ibid, 83). Generally speaking, the disagreements and fractions on the left wing came down to the question of what socialism meant, and where to seek the true revolutionary theory: in reality (modeled on China or the Soviet Union) or in different theoretical variants of Marxism (ibid, 81).

Disagreements over questions such as these, among other things, also gave rise to SABAE—the union of conscientiously work-shy elements.

Founders and party profile

Founders of the political movement primarily were former members of Venstresocialisterne (Left-Wing Socialists) (hereafter, VS) and another smaller party of that time, Kommunistisk Arbejderparti (Communist Labor Party). The movement's 'chief-ideologists' were Paul Smith and Gustav Bunzel. Smith is a historian, journalist, teacher, and revue writer, and was Haugaard's campaign manager, as already mentioned. Bunzel is also a historian and specialized in Marxist economic thinking, so-called capital logic. He also worked as a teacher, but has lived on social benefits most of his life as he discloses in a more recent interview (Preisler 2006). Before founding SABAE, Bunzel writes on his website, he had over the course of 10 years "been through most left-wing standpoints and turned them down as contradictory nonsense" (Bunzel n.d.). Thus, to Bunzel at least, it seems, SABAE was founded in the spirit of confronting common political views on the left wing.

Similarly, in an interview Smith explains the rhetorical motive for creating SABAE as follows: "We were bitterly frustrated with the mourning mentality that characterized the public debate on unemployment. VS proudly proposed '100,000 new work places' in Parliament. We shook our heads: 100,000 times eight hours of waste of time, this was their finest vision—the ant state. This frustration became the conscientiously work-shy elements" (Øvig Knudsen 2001). In a time of political and economic instability and increasing unemployment, SABAE had a different message: being out of work meant, in fact, being *free* from work, as Smith and Bunzel maintain in SABAE's manifesto written in 1979 (SABAE 1982, 7). Rather than minimizing unemployment, SABAE worked at minimizing the necessary workload. Bunzel writes on his website that their dream was that "the work-free and the workers would unite so that more money and lack of time was united with less money and more time." But, as he continues: "This didn't really happen" (Bunzel 2016).

Thus, SABAE was conceived as a protest against VS' answer to the country's national crisis. A news article from the early days of the political movement describes it as "a functional party organization [*festsammenslutning*] of humorous students from Aarhus" that, however, has turned into a "left-wing sect like thousands others" (*Amtsavisen Randers*

1979). Haugaard moreover calls SABAE a parody of the political left wing in Denmark—and of VS in particular (Haugaard 1999, 9).

By virtue of its anti-mainstream and provocative position on employment, SABAE also may be understood as a type of avant-garde movement. The avant-garde metaphor commonly is associated with radical political and social thinking, and an art practice that radically challenges the ‘official’ culture (Calinescu 1996, 109). It also designates groups of innovative artists who separated from mainstream society and formed a number of anarchistic movements in the 1900s. The artists were critical of conventional norms, both in art and in society, and broke with such norms by inventing new aesthetic principles and ways of crafting art. “For they believed that to revolutionize art was the same as to revolutionize life” (ibid, 112).

Similarly, SABAE challenged the conventional political message of the time and contrarily claimed that it was simply a media-made ‘truth’ that one needed a job in order to be happy (Haugaard and Smith 1994, 55–56). By fighting “for the right to be lazy,” SABAE’s founders meant to provoke and mock the political left wing—and perhaps in particular the left wing parties they had recently been part of. SABAE is also described as an anarchistic movement without an organization: It maintained that all Danish citizens—except a particular group of teachers²⁴—automatically were members of SABAE, unless they specifically asked not to be (ibid).

Understanding SABAE as an avant-garde movement of sorts perhaps also explains why its founders decided to recruit Haugaard: Their chief purpose was to provoke and judging from Haugaard’s performance at their anniversary party, he was good at doing just that. As Smith moreover explains, the choice of Haugaard was an “obvious propagandistic opportunity” (Øvig Knudsen 2001): Before Haugaard joined the movement, it was not paid much media attention. This soon changed.

More specifically, Haugaard and SABAE used techniques in their election campaigns that are associated with the avant-garde movement Dada. Before turning to their campaigns, I therefore go over some basic definitions and characteristics of Dada.

²⁴ The excluded teachers were associated with the so-called ‘traveling folk high school’ named Tvind. Tvind was founded in 1970 by a group of teachers, but is mainly associated with one teacher in particular, Mogens Amdi Petersen. Over the years Tvind has been heavily debated and criticized for, among other things, being a cult or a sect of sorts.

On Dada

Dada is an avant-garde ‘anti-art’ movement that unfolded in the beginning of the 20th century. The name of the movement, Dada, is French for hobbyhorse, and the name apparently was chosen by planting a penknife randomly in a dictionary (Ayers 2001). The method exemplifies the “apogee of Dada expression,” namely, “the gratuitous act” (ibid). That is, the arbitrary, nonsensical, and seemingly pointless nature of Dada art. Like the avant-garde style in general could be described as an “anti-style” (Calinescu 1996, 111), Dada did not reflect any aesthetic or style. Overall, Dadaism was characterized by extremism as well as “buffoonery and provocative behavior to shock and disrupt public complacency” (Ayers 2001). A predilection for masks, absurdity, and hoaxes, among other things, speaks to the “carnavalesque” aspect of the movement, also reflected in the Dadaists’ understanding of “the power of the Fool” (Lewer 2012, 99).

Dada artwork commonly took shape as nonsense poetry, collage, and montage, and was characterized by such artistic principles as chance, irony, and indifference (Richter 1978, 59). Dada artists disassembled original works and rearranged fragments of text, words, letters, or objects in a random order, that is, by chance. By doing so, they aimed at exposing the conventions of a work or genre (e.g., its language) and thus debunk its authority (Bergius 1980, 30). SABAE’S election posters particularly illustrate this disassembling method, as the analysis later will reveal. Moreover, Dadaists assigned equal value to random objects (for instance, an embryo to a shoe-advertisement) in their works, which reflected both irony and indifference. This procedure signified “the disintegration of bourgeois culture and the reduction of all values to a single level” (Bergius 1980, 31).

Buffoonery, provocative behavior, chance, and irony also characterize SABAE’s uptakes of conventional campaign genres. Examples of how these Dada principles manifest more specifically in the campaigns are offered throughout the chapter, as I go over the election campaigns and election results.

Haugaard for MP: election campaigns 1979 – 1994

Overall, SABAE’s election campaigns are perhaps best characterized as the results of a small group of people or friends creating election material (primarily election posters), producing election promises, and hosting unconventional election events involving—or,

rather, centering on—music, entertainment, and alcohol. In the early years, the campaigns reflect small budgets, but as Haugaard's election results improved in the late 1980s, his campaigns reflect a larger income. I will examine SABAE's posters and a selection of its election promises and events later in this chapter.

Smith and Bunzel were, as mentioned, the movement's chief-ideologists, and thus the masterminds behind the campaigns, although Bunzel soon left SABAE—a point to which I will return. Furthermore, Haugaard's brother, Jan Haugaard, was part of the movement and officially became Haugaard's campaign manager in 1988, as he explains in an interview: "Kennedy was successful with his [brother] as campaign manager, which is why I have selected my brother Jan Haugaard for the post" (*B.T.* 1988).

Haugaard recalls in his autobiography that his role in the movement was established right from the start: He was to be the front figure of the political movement, whereas the rest of the group told him what to say, had the ideas, and wrote the election material (Haugaard 1999, 14-15). Haugaard, in turn, "had no idea what was going on and therefore did not know what [the] political movement was about" (*ibid.*). Thanks to Haugaard, however, the movement managed to generate "oceans of press coverage," as an article emphatically puts it, during each election campaign (*Århus Stiftstidende* 1994b). The analysis of Haugaard's election events will illustrate this in particular.

SABAE's first election campaign in 1979 resulted in 797 votes (Danmarks Statistik 1980, 210). Although the result is far from the 15,000–20,000 votes it takes to be elected, several newspapers emphasize Haugaard's result as a (small) success. For example, *Aarhus Stiftstidende* writes that independent candidates nationwide only received 969 votes in total, thus Haugaard received almost 80 percent of all votes (*Aarhus Stiftstidende* 1979b. See also: *Midtjyllands Avis* 1979, *Dagbladet (Folketidende)* 1979).

During SABAE's second election in 1981, Haugaard's lack of political knowledge became a source of irritation for Bunzel and other members of SABAE, whose political involvement was far more serious (Bunzel n.d.). They were interested in gaining political influence—Haugaard was interested in having fun. To him, campaigning was only one out of many ways he aspired to become famous, as he writes in his autobiography (Haugaard 1999, 25). In a 1984 interview, Haugaard phrases this ambition as follows: "The media interests me a lot. But I never watch TV. I can't be bothered. I want to be *on* TV. My strength

as a musician is not that I can play music—but that I am freaking crazy about putting on a show. I could put on a show 10 times a day” (*Herning Folkeblad* 1984). Haugaard’s outspoken desire to entertain reflects that he did not run for election to get elected but to become famous—and have fun. Thus, he did not use the campaign genre for its generic purpose.

Consequently, Bunzel withdrew from SABAE and a partnership arose between Haugaard and his campaign manager: “Paul Smith and I were the only ones who adhered to the idea that there was no idea at all. Anyone can get elected if the empty pledges are delivered convincingly” (Haugaard 1999, 12). Accordingly, Haugaard consistently removed the political messages or meaning from his election material so that there was “no meaning in my [election] program,” as he says in a TV interview (Uhrbrandt 1995). Haugaard and Smith’s most central “gratuitous act” in accordance with Dada was to take up the election promise and not actually promise anything at all. Their purpose, in other words, was not to engage in politics as such, but rather to sabotage the act of politics. Before moving on with the outline of Haugaard’s campaigns, I therefore examine a selection of these promises next.

SABAE’s election promises

SABAE and Haugaard launched a wide variety of election promises over the years. These are included on their election posters, which I examine later. As I discuss in Chapter 5, Haugaard is still remembered for some of these promises today.

Making a promise is, as Charlotte Jørgensen notes, an illocutionary speech act, or in other terms, a performative (Jørgensen 2010).²⁵ She observes that promises play a key part in election campaigns especially, since “*advocating* main party issues for future politics easily turns into politicians actually performing the act of *promising* to implement a certain policy” (ibid). Thus, the election promise can be understood as a standard genre in political

²⁵ According to modern speech-act theory, primarily based on the work of J. L. Austin (1962/1976) and John Searle (1969), an utterance like: “I now pronounce you husband and wife,” is an *illocutionary* act (because there is an intention behind the utterance: to wed two people) with a *perlocutionary* effect (because the act of saying the words has consequences: now the two people are married). Hence, the words are directly performing an action.

rhetoric that serves the social action of helping the electorate decide how to vote (Miller 1984).

Most of Haugaard's election promises, however, violate the genre and the expectations that accompany the genre. For example, many promises have nothing to do with politics such as "Bedre julegaver" ("Better Christmas presents") and "Gratis øl" ("Free beer"). Haugaard also makes promises he for obvious reasons cannot keep, namely "Bedre vejr" ("Better weather") and "Medvind på cykelstierne" ("Tailwind on bicycle paths"). Neither of these promises concerns SABAE's stance on political issues or discloses its future policies. Thus, they do not serve as guides to voters—at least not when it comes to the movement's political agenda.

Given the arbitrary nature of these promises, they exhibit deliberate violations of the genre. They are, in other words, parodic uptakes of election promises (Freadman 2002). Haugaard doubles the act of making promises, but makes promises that are out of place in a political context or essentially impossible. The absurdity of making such promises signals SABAE's satiric intent: By pledging "Tailwind on bicycle paths," for instance, which is a self-evidently empty promise, they expose traditional election promises as equally empty.

Overall, however, Haugaard's election promises reflect a use of humor that does not contain much satire. If satire commonly is understood as "cutting, blistering, biting, killing, stinging," using a few of Elliott's terms (Elliott 1961, 281), and "militant irony," echoing Frye's definition (Frye 1973, 223), then these election promises reflect a mild form of satire. Thus, they are better characterized as "irony with relatively little satire" (ibid).

Furthermore, one may observe that Haugaard's promises tend to serve a unifying function (Meyer 2000) as they cover a wide field of interests, age groups, and social groups. For instance, Haugaard promises "Unge mænd til enlige mødre" ("Young men for single mothers"), "Elektriske kedler til alle over 60 år" ("Electric kettles for everyone above 60"), "Nutella i feltrationer" (Nutella in field rations), and "Mere madro i de danske fængsler" ("More peace during meals in Danish prisons"). As these promises reflect different groups in society (single mothers, people above 60, prisoners) and center on topics that most people talk about (the weather) or want (tail wind, free beer, presents), they may help create identification between sender and recipient, as they raise issues familiar to the wide public (Meyer 2000, 318-319).

In general, SABAE's election promises therefore mirror a use of humor that is not very sharp and more including than excluding. Haugaard's wide public appeal and popularity, thus, also may be traced back to his election promises.

The election campaigns 1981 – 1994

SABAE's efforts at the following two elections brought in fewer votes than at the first election in 1979: only 558 votes in 1981 (Danmarks Statistik 1982, 205) and 676 votes in 1984 (Danmarks Statistik 1985, 207). However, at Haugaard's fourth election in 1987, his number of votes more than tripled to 2,275 (Danmarks Statistik 1989a, 197). One plausible reason for the increase is that Haugaard in the meantime, between 1984 and 1987, had become famous in Denmark as a result of his collaboration with comedian Finn Nørbygaard. Thus, his growing popularity and celebrity status most likely had a positive impact on his elections too.

The next call for election was only one year later, in 1988, and once again Haugaard's number of votes increased to 3,221 (Danmarks Statistik 1989b, 86). At this election, a new rule had come into force stating that political parties or single persons that obtain more than 1,000 votes receive 5 DKK per vote in government support for their political work. But, as Haugaard explains in his autobiography: "Since daily political work in my case was a somewhat fuzzy concept I decided to fulfill one of my election promises and give away free beer" (Haugaard 1999, 32). Thus, Haugaard spent his government support on hosting an event in October 1988 at which he served free beer. This event turned out popular: 2,000 people came and at least 800 were turned away (*Ekstra Bladet* 1988).

Haugaard repeated the successful "beer party" (*Ekstra Bladet* 1991) in 1989 (*Århus Stiftstidende* 1989) and 1991, following the 1990 election at which he increased his number of votes to 8,717 (IndenrigsMinisteriet 1996, 190). This event was only one out of several popular election activities and meetings that Haugaard hosted over the years. Understanding Haugaard's success therefore requires an analysis of these campaign events. Moreover, since these activities involve interaction between Haugaard—the candidate—and voters, they qualify as interpersonal campaigning. In the following genre analysis of Haugaard's campaign activities I therefore start out by outlining the substance,

form, and social action of interpersonal campaign communication, and continue to describe and analyze the characteristics of Haugaard's activities.

Interpersonal campaign communication as genre and Haugaard's election events

Although it is difficult, if not impossible, to establish the exact effect of interpersonal communication, researchers and political consultants agree that the personal meeting between candidate and voters plays a crucial role in an election campaign (Maarek 2011, 228; Trent et al. 2016, 232; Tolstrup 2013, 150). Unlike messages delivered through other central communication channels, such as print media or electronic media, the personal meeting is harder to ignore and more likely to leave a lasting impression with voters.

The meeting between candidate and voter may take many forms, and some of the most common types of interpersonal campaigning are so-called "special events" that the campaign organization helps arrange and others host for the candidate (Shaw 2018, 126). These "campaign-sponsored activities," such as coffees, dinners, receptions, or picnics, serve the purpose of fundraising and gathering support for the candidate (ibid). Door-to-door canvassing is another "major form" of interpersonal campaigning (Trent et al. 2016, 236) and "highly recommended" (Maarek 2011, 228). It principally serves the purpose of promoting interaction between candidate and voters.

Interpersonal campaign activities also include other types of election meetings or events such as visits to local communities, universities, or clubs, and participation in civic meetings, sports events, parades, town gatherings, and panel debates (Trent et al. 2016, 234; Tolstrup 2013, 166). In fact, "the audiovisual debate," Maarek writes, "is increasingly regarded as the keystone of the election campaign" (2011, 125). Panel debates may take place at public or private institutions, e.g., businesses and universities, between two or more candidates from different political parties (Tolstrup 2013, 152). Debates also provide an opportunity to interact with the audience, either during the debate in a question-and-answer session, or afterwards.

In terms of the substance of interpersonal campaign activities, literature on interpersonal campaigning generally stresses the personal aspect of the meeting more than anything else. Of course, it matters how a candidate is able to present and explain his/her political views and visions, but in the personal meeting presence is central. For instance, political consultants note that in canvassing the successful candidate is someone who

appears committed and accessible. Candidates therefore are instructed to listen without interrupting or arguing, speak with passion, stay open-minded, and find a common ground with the voter in order to leave a positive, personal impression (Shaw 2018, 179; Tolstrup 2013, 176).

In interpersonal campaigning, the more personal the meeting between candidate and voter is, it seems, the less it is about what is being said and the more it is about simply being present and *meeting* the voter. Establishing personal contact and a comfortable, relaxed atmosphere is at least as important as presenting one's political views in campaign activities such as door-to-door canvassing or events with fewer people. Conversely, the less personal the activity is, the more room it leaves for the candidate to go into detail with his/her political program and visions.

Thus, overall, the social function of interpersonal campaigning, like the entire election campaign, is to generate support for the candidate and win votes. More specifically, the meetings primarily serve the purpose of establishing personal contact and relations to voters. Candidates accomplish this by appearing present and accessible, and by demonstrating their concern and personality. Secondly, interpersonal campaign activities serve to increase candidate visibility and publicity, raise funds, solicit volunteers, and reinforce the bond to supporters (Trent et al. 2016, 234-235; Shaw 2018, ch. 7; Tolstrup 2013, 150). Conversely, to voters, an election meeting provides the opportunity to meet the political candidates and personally ask them questions about issues of concern to them.

Based on the extensive press coverage of Haugaard's election campaigns, his interpersonal campaign activities may be characterized as election meetings, as the media also commonly refers to them (e.g., Kaptain 1991). That is, public events (or in fact "parties") hosted by Haugaard at different locations, though mainly a public building, "Ridehuset," and local bars in Aarhus. These events are labeled "untraditional" in many press cuttings, which the following analysis includes, primarily because of the high level of entertainment at the meetings and the low level of political content. The substance of these election meetings thus reveals that Haugaard takes up the genre to accomplish a social action that does not (entirely) correspond with the election campaign genre.

Haugaard furthermore participated in a traditional election meeting against a well-established politician. Although the form of the event was more conventional, this too Haugaard distorts with his presence. Moreover, Haugaard carried out events at which he handed out Christmas presents to people. Although handing out free merchandise or food is not unusual during an election campaign (e.g., Tolstrup 2013, 168), Haugaard's generous sharing breaks with conventional interpersonal campaigning.

The following section examines a selection of these meetings and events based on the media coverage they yielded in chronological order starting in 1990. The primary purpose of the analysis is to uncover how these meetings took place; how Haugaard violates the interpersonal campaigning genre; and how these violations, and the meetings more generally, may have impacted his public image and electoral success.

Haugaard's election meetings and events

Five days before the national election on 12th of December 1990, Haugaard met with Uffe Ellemann-Jensen, the foreign minister and party chairman of the conservative-liberal party Venstre at the time. The showdown took place in the central shopping street (*Strøget*) in Aarhus for about an hour and according to press coverage several hundred people witnessed 'the duel' in between their Christmas shopping (Dithmer 1990). Originally, the showdown was between Ellemann-Jensen and the party chairman of the Social Democratic Party, Svend Auken, who declined, and Haugaard therefore took his place in the duel as "party chairman" of SABAE (*Berlingske Tidende* 1990). Unlike Haugaard's election meetings the subsequent years, this was described as a "traditional" event in the media, namely the "long-awaited [...] showdown between two local politicians in Aarhus" (Thomsen 1990).

Reports about the showdown primarily reproduce Haugaard's extraordinary election promises, such as "Bedre vejr" ("Better weather") and "Partistøtten tilbage til folket" ("The financial support to political parties [must go] back to the people"), and the good-natured exchange of words between him and Ellemann-Jensen. For instance:

Uffe: 'Haugaard's demand for more whales in Randers fiord is a good and liberal initiative. I will make sure that we along with the Greenlanders and the international whale commission set up a summer camp for whales at Udbyhøj [a village on the south side of

Randers fiord], after which Jacob is sent to Greenland to perform as a walrus in the fiord of Godthåb.’ **Jacob**: ‘My looks are well suited for being a walrus. I was so ugly when I was little that my mother had to tie a pork chop around my neck, just so the dog would play with me.’²⁶ (Thomsen 1990)

Rather than dismiss or simply ignore Haugaard as a (practical) joke, the exchange illustrates how Ellemann-Jensen—a well-established and high profile politician—plays along with Haugaard’s nonsensical election program. The most obvious reason for this is that it generates publicity. In fact, one news article is headed: “The foreign minister adjusts to Jacob,” emphasizing that although Ellemann-Jensen initially had planned for the meeting to take place on Friday afternoon, Haugaard’s calendar was fully booked “so there was only time for the foreign minister *Thursday* afternoon” (*Århus Stiftstidende* 1990, original emphasis). Thus, the article suggests that against a foreign minister and high-profile politician, Haugaard contrarily is the one in power. He is the main attraction. The meeting thus reflects Haugaard’s popularity and his apparent status, since being seen with him obviously guarantees media coverage, which is essential during a campaign. It moreover illustrates the category of celebrity politics referring to a politician ‘using’ a celebrity to promote his public image.

Interestingly, one reporter notes that Ellemann-Jensen also managed to “sneak a bit of ‘real’ electioneering in through the backdoor,” as he for a joke challenges Haugaard to find “the real [Svend] Auken” because he “in this election campaign resembles a remote-controlled robot more and more” (Dithmer 1990). Ellemann-Jensen thus takes up the opportunity to ridicule his actual political opponent, Auken. Moreover, it is well understood that the event is not an actual debate between two politicians but rather a media stunt intended to create publicity and attract voters. Accordingly, one reporter observes that the duel resembled a show for the media more than an event for the people, since most people could not actually hear what the candidates were saying (Dithmer

²⁶ The text in the original: “**Uffe**: ‘Jacobs krav om flere hvaler til Randers Fjord er et godt og liberalt initiativ. Jeg vil sørge for, at vi nu sammen med grønlænderne og den internationale hvalkommission får indrettet en sommerlejr for hvaler ved Udbyhøj, hvorefter Jacob skal sendes til Grønland og optræde som hvalros i Godthåbsfjorden.’ **Jacob**: ‘Med mit udseende egner jeg mit fint som hvalros. Jeg var så grim, da jeg var lille, at min mor var nødt til at hænge en svinekotelet om halsen på mig, for ellers ville hunden ikke engang lege med mig.’”

1990). Thus, the purpose of this interpersonal campaign event mostly was about generating publicity and less about meeting voters.

Around a week later, Haugaard received 8,717 votes at the 1990 election as mentioned, and as promised he spent his financial government support for political parties (*partistøtte*), which amounted to around 50,000 DKK, on hosting a public party for his voters. He did so on 20th of October 1991. Like the previous events in 1988 and 1989, this also took place at the preserved, public building in the center of Aarhus called “Ridehuset.” This year Haugaard not only served beer (1,625 liters, to be exact), but also 20 kilos of Danish candies (*guld-karameller*), 180 liters of soft drinks, and red sausages. The sausages came at a small cost and the profit went to the pediatrics units at all the hospitals in the county. According to the national newspaper *B.T.* (Thomsen 1991), between 5,000 and 6,000 voters and children attended “the untraditional election meeting” (Kaptain 1991), which was described by several sources as follows:

Upon entry into Ridehuset and the three-hour long “beer party” (Ekstra Bladet 1991) people were greeted by Haugaard, who shook everybody’s hands (*Politiken* 1991). A small band played live music (evergreens) and for about an hour Haugaard performed a “good-humored” (Thomsen 1991) and “terrific” (*Ekstra Bladet* 1991) show on stage during which he “reeled off” (*Politiken* 1991) election slogans, political jokes, and anecdotes. He also performed several acts on a spade, which he had rebuilt into a guitar,²⁷ and sang the “work-shy” song: “Venner, lad værktøjet ligge / hvad skal vi bruge det til? / Arbejde gider vi ikke / Det har vi tyskerne til!” (“Friends, leave the tools alone / What are they for? / Work we do not bother / That is what the Germans are for”) (Kaptain 1991). The song is a rewrite of the revolutionary working-class song “Brødre lad våbnene lyne” (“Brothers let your weapons blaze”) from 1919 by the Social Democratic poet and journalist, Oskar Hansen.²⁸ SABAE’s parodic uptake of the song conversely corresponds with its work-shy theme.

²⁷ In Danish “spade” is a well-known slang term for a guitar.

²⁸ The song lyrics in the original: “Brødre lad våbnene lyne / slaget, det sidste, er nær / Sejrenes dag er i syne / brødre, for arbejdets hær.” The song lyrics in English: “Brothers let your weapons blaze / the battle, the last, is near / The days of victory are within sight / Brothers, for the army of work”

The tradition of working-class and protest songs in Denmark dates back to 1870 and served to establish the identity of the working class movement and strengthen the solidarity. These songs were also popular in the 1960s and 1970s in the left wing parties and movements that emerged in the wake of the student revolt of 1968 (danmarkshistorien.dk, n.d.). Passion usually characterizes the working-class songs, both text and music. However, in SABAE's parodic uptake of this song pathos turns to bathos, marking "repetition with critical distance" (Hutcheon 1985). Whereas the original song communicated a shared social purpose—to join the workers' fight—this version advocates doing as little as possible. The revolutionary passion is, to say the least, limited, and the opposing, incongruous function of the song marks its satirical edge.

Overall, the event constitutes a parodic uptake of an election meeting that distorts the genre in several ways: First, in contrast to the generic purpose of an election meeting, the primary purpose of Haugaard's meeting is to serve free beer. As mentioned, it is not uncommon that such meetings also include alcohol, entertainment, or music, but they primarily constitute a chance for candidates to meet voters, listen to comments or concerns, and present policy issues. However, the main content of Haugaard's election meeting is alcohol and entertainment—a point also captured by the media, as several label the event "beer party." Thus, the meeting had little to do with politics, as this news article also observes: "Jacob Haugaard is the political candidate who is able to strip without anybody thinks of sex and to host an election meeting without anybody thinks of it as politics" (*Aalborg Stiftstidende* 1994). Adding to this, the meeting does not even take place in connection with an election, which is the usual exigence.

Second, it is not remarkable in of itself that a candidate hosts a public event at which there is free alcohol and food, entertainment and music. What is remarkable about this public party is that it is not a "campaign-sponsored activity" in the conventional sense, since the money Haugaard spent on the event was government support intended for a party's political work. Even more remarkable is the fact that based on the event Haugaard is praised for fulfilling his election promises: "Gratis øl" ("Free beer") and "Partistøtten tilbage til folket" ("The financial support to political parties [must go] back to the people"), even though these obviously are not election promises in the conventional sense. For example, one reporter observes: "What a party. None of the existing politicians are able to

bring together as many people as Jacob Haugaard [...] the man known for keeping his election promises" (Thomsen 1991).²⁹

The positive reaction expressed here and in most press cuttings suggests that people acknowledge and appreciate Haugaard's parodic uptake of an election meeting—and especially of the election promise. The audience not only seems to find Haugaard's act entertaining, but also an accurate performance of incongruous, bordering on immoral, political conduct, as this newspaper quotation illustrates: "While the shriveled and limp politicians at Christiansborg enrich themselves personally, Jacob Haugaard appeared yesterday as host of real life" (*Ekstra Bladet* 1991).³⁰ In terms of the fifth principle of Functional Theory, Haugaard may not have any actual policy statements, but in turn he is credited the personal characteristics (honesty) and moral ideals voters generally seek (Benoit 2007, 53-54). Thus, on this account voters likely ascribed him high ethos (Isager 2003). Moreover, as the event overall serves to expose and attack traditional election promises as untrustworthy, Haugaard thereby performs the social function of political humor.

The quotation above also reflects the public image that the media helped create of Haugaard as a 'man of the people,' which corresponds with this reporter's conclusion as well: "Jacob Haugaard, the phenomenon, was to many at least as important as the free beer" (Kaptain 1991). Like at the meeting between him and the foreign minister, Haugaard himself is the main attraction—not the substance of the election event.

The success of this event and others of its like also relate to Haugaard's ability to create a personal meeting, it seems, even though more than 5,000 people attended. Based on the press coverage, Haugaard established this personal contact to people through his presence both off stage and on. For instance, several reporters note that Haugaard "politely shook people's hands" at the entrance (*Ekstra Bladet* 1991) and that people "were very happy to meet him" (*Politiken* 1991). Political consultants generally emphasize the importance of eye contact and handshakes in the meeting between candidate and voter (Trent et al. 2016, 236; Tolstrup 2013, 151). Thus, handshakes matter in interpersonal

²⁹ The text in the original: "Sikke en fest. Ingen af politikerne magter at samle så mange mennesker som Jacob Haugaard [...] manden, der er kendt for at holde sine valgløfter."

³⁰ The text in the original: "Mens Christiansborgs vindtørre og slatne politikere rager personligt til sig, stod Jacob Haugaard i går som vært for det ægte liv."

campaigning, and shaking hands with more than 5,000 people is not an insignificant act. It made an impression. Meeting a candidate in person, moreover, is a “unique event” for most people and the meeting itself may be of more importance than what took place at this meeting or was said and done (Trent et al. 2016, 238).

Haugaard’s performance on stage and sing-along also reveals the inclusive nature of his show and personality, as this speech excerpt illustrates: “We prove the highest level of civilization when we can get along so nicely—so many people crammed together. Out there among you are people in wheelchairs. And there are children who cannot see anything but ass cheeks [...] Pass on a beer [*bajer*]³¹ to the people in wheelchairs, will you, and ask them if they are all right” (*Ekstra Bladet* 1991).³² The quotation illustrates Haugaard’s presence in the room—an effective strategy in interpersonal campaigning as mentioned—and according to the reporter, it illustrates how Haugaard lends his support to the “ultimately weakest.” Based on his concern for people and inclusive manner (*eunoia*), Haugaard is thus ascribed high ethos in this news report. It extends the impression of him as a man of the people as alluded to earlier.

In continuation, more than one reporter observe the variety of people attending the event: “Nice looking elderly ladies, punkers, baldies, relics from the 60s, the well dressed, and sots” (*Ekstra Bladet* 1991) along with “Sunday dressed family fathers in wind jackets and tie” as well as “[people in] black leather jackets with green crew-cut hair” (*Politiken* 1991). Haugaard appeals to all types of people from all types of social classes, it seems, which too reflects his folksy character and type of humor. Maybe because: “Everybody knows Jacob,” as a newspaper quotes someone for saying, and: “He is a nice guy” (*Ekstra Bladet* 1991). Beer and sausages, moreover, are trademarks of Danish folk culture, and thus add to his popular appeal. All in all, the press coverage of the event suggests that Haugaard’s popularity was connected to his presence, inclusive and folksy personality, and entertaining skills.

³¹ In the original Haugaard uses the Danish slang word for beer, *bajer*, for which there is no accurate translation in English. It is a national, informal word, commonly associated with Danish folk culture.

³² The text in the original: “Vi beviser den højeste form for civilisation, når vi kan have det så rart – så mange mennesker stuvet sammen. Nede mellem jer holder folk i kørestole. Og der er små børn, der ikke får set andet end røvbalder [...] Tag lige og stik en bajer til folk i kørestolene og spørg, om de har det godt.”

Haugaard likely added to his popular appeal as he started to spend his government support on Christmas presents the following years. Instead of hosting his public parties³³ Haugaard initiated a “Santa Claus tour” (*julemands-turné*) (*Berlingske Tidende* 1993) in 1992 and 1993 and handed out presents to people, thereby fulfilling more election promises: “Større julegaver” (“Bigger Christmas presents”) and “Elektriske kedler til alle over 60 år” (“Electric kettles for everyone above 60”) (*B.T.* 1992).

According to *Ekstra Bladet*, the event in December 1992 proceeded as follows: Haugaard started handing out electric kettles at a retirement home, Eskegården, “so that they may sit in their living rooms and have a decent cup of coffee.” He continued at a local shopping mall (*Salling*) dressed in a Santa Claus costume “and asked people what they wanted for Christmas.” Here, he handed out clothes and computer games for young men, a fur and microwave for elderly women, and a bassinet for a mother. In total, Haugaard spent a little more than 20,000 DKK on his ‘shopping spree.’ “People got what they wanted. The [woman who wanted] the red underwear dreamed of having another child. Everyone got a piece of the action. Once again I have been the supplier of exceptional experiences. People never know when I strike. And of course, I will run for next election. I have always advocated better Christmas presents, so I almost have fulfilled my [election] program” (*Ekstra Bladet* 1992).

The most contradictory aspect of this “Santa Claus tour” is that it has nothing to do with an election, an election campaign, or politics more generally besides the fact that Haugaard again spent his government support for political parties on the activity. Neither the form, nor the content resembles the interpersonal campaigning genre. These events similarly illustrate Haugaard’s folksiness and wide appeal to different types of people (young, old, mothers) as well as his ability to relate to them and their individual wishes.

In his autobiography, Haugaard notes that during his last election campaign in 1994, he went on an election tour around Aarhus County for the first time (Haugaard 1999, 42). The newspapers report about at least three election meetings close to the election. Similarly,

³³ Haugaard stopped spending his government support on beer, because he himself was treated for alcohol abuse in 1992 (*B.T.* 1992).

these may be categorized as public events or election meetings and also include beer, entertainment, singing, and a wide range of election promises.

The first meeting on 9th of September took place at a square in Aarhus, Pustervig Torv, in a beer tent. The “anything but ordinary election meeting” (Knudsen 1994) is described as a “crowd-puller” (Lopes 1994), and like at the public party in 1991, Haugaard “the prophet” (*Det Fri Aktuelt* 1994) entertains the crowds with his “one man show” (*Skive Folkeblad* 1994) on stage, performing songs on his ‘spade’ and telling political anecdotes, jokes, along with a long line of election promises.

The subsequent election meetings only few days before Election Day, 21st of September, proceeded in similar ways. Both meetings took place at bars and are described as popular events as well. For instance, *B.T.* reports that the “slightly unusual” election meeting at the bar “Marius Øltapper” in Skanderborg (a town 25 kilometers southwest of Aarhus) was sold out long before Haugaard came on stage “and while hundreds had a good time at ‘the polling place’ [*valglokalet*], many people remained outside, disappointed, shuddering in the cold” (F. Larsen 1994). Likewise, the third election meeting on 19th of September at the bar “Skrædderiet” in Aarhus “collected a great crowd in the street” of people trying to catch Haugaard’s “words of wisdom in the final stage of the election,” according to the reporter from *Ekstra Bladet* (Bresemann 1994a). The local newspaper *Århus Stiftstidende* was also present at the meeting and describes the size of the crowd at the small bar as “almost lethal” (*Århus Stiftstidende* 1994a) and characterizes the atmosphere in terms of “roars of laughter” resonating (*Århus Stiftstidende* 1994b).

Moreover, an article mentions that only a few hundred meters from the bar, another election meeting with representatives from five political parties (*femkantet vælgermøde*) was taking place, but by comparison only 40 people came (Larsen 1994).

As with all of Haugaard’s election events, the press coverage of these meetings appears to be almost exclusively positive. This observation not only reflects Haugaard’s popularity, but also that he was not regarded as an actual political candidate—and thus not treated as such either. As a reporter remarks: “He is the only parliamentary candidate whom the press never poses critical questions. One might look a fool” (*Århus Stiftstidende* 1994b). In other words: If you try to take Haugaard seriously, the joke is on you.

Haugaard’s ‘strategy’ thus resembles the ancient sophist Gorgias’ advice for use of humor

as a persuasive means, namely “that one should spoil the opponents’ seriousness with laughter and their laughter with seriousness” (Aristotle 2007, pt. 1419b).

Consequently, Haugaard’s events are not evaluated as traditional election events in accordance with the genre either, but instead as a form of entertainment. If people are entertained by his parodic uptake of an election campaign and recognize the absurdity of the incongruities he points out, they may choose to support him (vote). Thus, by fulfilling the social function of political humor and succeeding as an entertainer, Haugaard inadvertently succeeds in the election genre too.

Moreover, Haugaard’s success relates to his presence and the atmosphere he creates at the events. Overall, he succeeds at selling an inclusive atmosphere and community feeling due to his folksiness and self-disparaging use of irony. No one is left behind in the company of Haugaard because he is as inappropriate or misplaced as they come. His consequent distortions of the interpersonal campaigning genre and election campaign genre overall, entails that he is only evaluated as a comedian or entertainer, not an actual political candidate. Thus, in this sense, his generic violations work in his favor and his rise in the polls may be explained, at least in part, by these free events and initiatives. Along with his growing stardom as comedian and actor these years, his popularity most likely rested on his wide public appeal—an appeal that is also identifiable in his many untraditional election posters, which I examine next.

The election poster as genre and SABAE’s election posters

An election poster commonly is characterized as a form of political advertising (Holtz-Bacha and Johansson 2017, 1) or an “agitational tool” (Aulich and Sylvestrová 1999, 1). According to Holtz-Bacha and Johansson, political posters emerged during the revolutions where they were employed to “make announcements and inform about events” (2017, 3). With the rise of political parties and consequently party competition, electoral posters surfaced (ibid, 5).

Overall, an election poster may be defined as a poster that is used before an election to influence recipients to vote, either for the sender of the poster or the political party to which the sender belongs (Nedergaard & Aasted Schanz 2015, 12). Thus, the purpose of an election poster is to disseminate a political conviction or endorse a political candidate. Its social action, like the election campaign genre overall, is to generate support (votes) for the

candidate or political message. It moreover can serve myriad functions, including drawing attention to an upcoming election; activating the electorate to vote; and generating publicity (Holtz-Bacha and Johansson 2017, 7).

Furthermore, the election poster predominantly is a multimodal genre. In terms of its substantive characteristics, an election poster generally includes both *image*, in the form of photos, drawings, or photomontages, and *text*, in the form of heading, slogan, party name (or letter), election promise, caption, and explanatory or supplementary text (see e.g., Kjeldsen 2014 ch. 7; Geise 2017, 16; Novelli 2017, 97).

Numerous formal features also characterize election posters: *The size of type* often varies on a poster and reflects how loudly the words are ‘meant’ to be spoken. “Yes,” “No,” and “Vote” are so-called ‘screaming’ words, that is, words you cannot avoid reading (Nedergaard and Aasted Schanz 2015, 10). *The font* can signal the ‘seriousness’ of a party by appearing classic, modern, or more artistic. *The color of letters* and *background* can indicate ‘emotions’ or political affiliation. In Western cultures light colors are often perceived as ‘friendly’ or ‘cheerful’ and warm, whereas dark colors are perceived as sad, hostile, heavy, and cold (Kjeldsen 2014, 303–4). Moreover, red is commonly associated with the political left wing and blue with the political right wing. *The punctuation* serves to accentuate the message of the poster through exclamation marks, question marks, dashes, and periods (Nedergaard & Aasted Schanz 2015, 10).

A central function of election posters is to evoke emotions in order to make voters act (Geise 2017, 16). Elements resting on appeals to ethos or pathos, arousing such emotions as anger or compassion, are thus recurrent on the election poster. For instance, elements describing the sender’s qualifications (*phronesis*) or expressing indignation on behalf of the voter and the voter’s rights (*eunoia*). Moreover, the most dominant type of election poster today consists of a close-up portrait of the candidate looking directly into the camera and thereby expresses authority (*phronesis*) (Novelli 2017, 99). This image may be anchored with a slogan in which the candidate pledges to assume responsibility for the state of the country and thus appear trustworthy (*arête*).

Accordingly, election posters often argue implicitly through a combination of textual and visual elements. To understand how, Roland Barthes’ notions of *anchorage* and *relay* are of help (Barthes 1984): According to Barthes, “all images are polysemous,” thus, the recipient could arrive at different possible meanings of an image (39). The use of words

is one way of delimiting the number of possible meanings. Hence, adding text to an image is a guide to how to understand or describe and interpret the image. This is the function of *anchorage* (in French: *ancrage*), which is also the most common function of textual messages: the words anchor the meaning of the image (ibid, 40). Conversely, the image can also anchor the meaning of the words.

In instances of *relay* (in French: *relais*), the image and text express a different content. The text that functions as relay adds meaning to the image, which cannot be found in the image itself. The two forms of expressions complement each other, and together they create a new meaning that “is realized at a higher level, that of the story, the anecdote, the diegesis” (ibid, 41). This function often is seen in comic strips or caricatures. Both functions will be illustrated in the analysis.

Last, in *Valget er dit!*³⁴ (2015), Peter Nedergaard and Elsebeth Aasted Schanz examine the development of Danish election posters from the past 100 years. Overall, before 1960, the genre was characterized by an imaginative, artistic, and varied imagery (ibid, 44). The posters contained a high level of detail and frequently relied on dramatic visuals, indignant slogans, and a satiric edge. They told a story, so to speak. During the 1950s, election posters started to lose their artistic originality and became more conventionalized. In the following decades, the posters increasingly lost their individuality and humor—although left wing parties produced most exceptions to this rule. As products of advertising agencies rather than individual artists, election posters became more streamlined and consequently more anonymous (ibid, 104).

In the 1970s and 1980s, portraits of the political candidate appearing in a suit, white shirt, and tie—their ‘uniform’—began to dominate election posters (ibid, 122). As is also the case today, the focus on the posters shifted from the voter to the political candidate. Whereas posters in previous decades reflected its voters individually or as a group, posters in these years and onwards centered on the politician. This tendency has continued: The election poster of today commonly is a polished portrait of the political candidate reflecting little, if any, originality. It only rarely tells a story or shows any artistic marks. In many

³⁴ The book title has two possible translations: It could either mean ‘The choice is yours!’ or ‘The election is yours!’

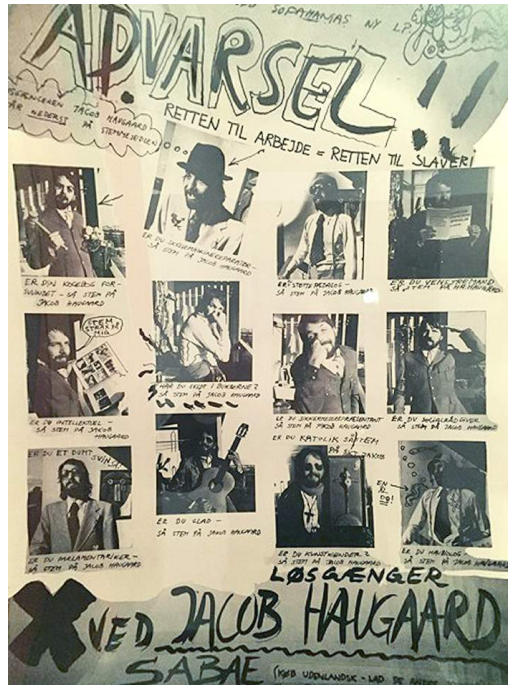
cases, it focuses on the politician rather than the voter or the political standpoint (ibid, 138).

Having examined the formal and substantial characteristics and social functions of the election poster genre, as well as the development of election posters in Denmark from the 1950s to about 2000, the following section proceeds to explore how SABAE takes up the genre. For instance, what are the commonalities and differences between the genre and SABAE's election posters? Overall, the analysis aims to uncover the generic and parodic features of these posters and the social function they perform.

Analyzing the posters from a generic perspective moreover allows me to group the artifacts and characterize their similarities across recurrent situations, rather than analyze each of them in depth. The posters, being quite similar, are of less interest individually but taken together they reflect the character of the unusual political left-wing movement and its election campaigns developing over time.

SABAE's election posters³⁵

“Advarsel!!” (“Warning!!”) (1979)



**“Gør gode tider bedre...”
 (“Make good times better...”) (1981)**

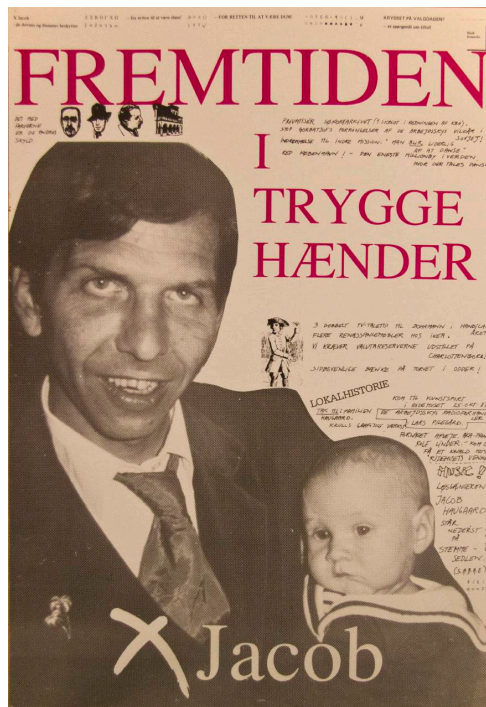


“Gift” (“Married”) (1984)

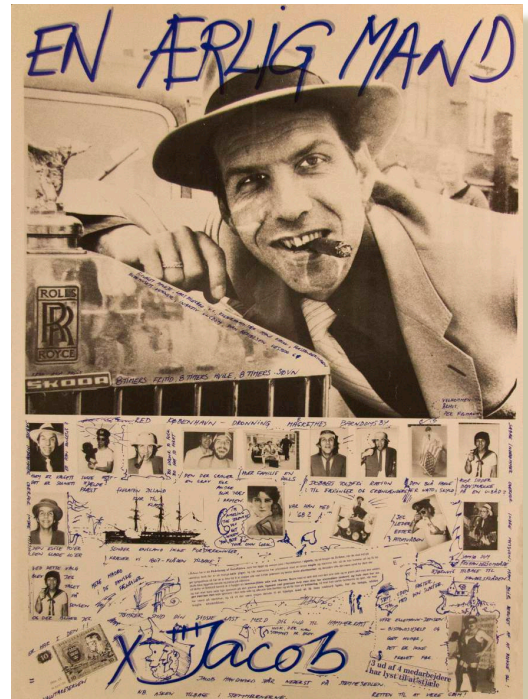
³⁵ See Appendix A for larger images. Photos of the first (1979) and last (1994) posters were kindly sent to me by Jacob Haugaard. Photos of the five additional posters were taken at Dansk Plakatmuseum (Danish Poster museum). I would like to thank Jacob Haugaard, Dansk Plakatmuseum, and my father and photographer, Poul Møller, for their help.

All seven posters are included with permission from Jacob Haugaard.

“Fremtiden i trygge hænder”
 (“The future in safe hands”) (1987)



“En ærlig mand”
 (“An honest man”) (1988)



“Gør din pligt: Kræv din ret”
 (“Do your duty: Demand your right”) (1990)



“Nu eller aldrig”
 (“Now or never”) (1994)



SABAE produced an election poster for each election campaign in 1979, 1981, 1984, 1987, 1988, 1990, and 1994. Each time the method of production, printing, and distribution of the posters was the same, as Smith recalls in emails sent to me:³⁶ The posters were assembled as one collage and printed in full size view at three different printing houses over the years. They printed approximately 1,000 posters and distributed these in Aarhus. Many were hung at Aarhus University, some in Aarhus city.³⁷ Some posters were handed out, and some posters were pushed under the glass doors of shops in Aarhus shopping street after closing hours Saturday afternoon at 2 p.m. Here, the posters served as advertisements on the floor until the shop opened again Monday morning at 10 a.m.

Moreover, Smith recalls with some certainty that from the third election in 1984 and onwards, they left the posters in the window of a second-hand bookshop (*Thurs Antikvariat*). The owner of the bookshop, Lars Thur had placed a plate for donations next to the posters, and all donations were spent on beer, since Haugaard very soon made enough money through his career as entertainer to pay for the posters himself (Smith 2016).

Overall, SABAE's election posters meet some of the criteria of the genre. Most significantly, they are responses to elections. They also share several substantive and stylistic characteristics of the election poster genre, as they are multimodal and (1) include an image (or images) of the political candidate, Haugaard; (2) include a heading and/or a slogan and the party name, SABAE; (3) function as an agitational tool, since they urge recipients to "vote Jacob;" (4) appeal to ethos through anchorage or relay; and (5) argue in favor of a cause and/or a candidate, also through anchorage or relay.

However, many elements or strategies on the posters deviate from the genre suggesting that these posters attempt to perform other social actions than getting Haugaard elected. The following subsections therefore will take a closer look at the commonalities and differences between the posters and the genre: First, by examining the posters' formal characteristics in terms of the visual expression; second, by examining Haugaard's self-representation on the posters; and third, by examining the posters' verbal substance in the form of its arguments and statements.

³⁶ See Appendix B.

³⁷ Smith moreover notes in his e-mail that VS (Left-Wing Socialists) in particular pasted over the SABAE posters with their own, which suggests that the party felt targeted.

Formal characteristics: visual expression

The composition and visual expression of the posters differ from the genre, as these posters contain more images, text, and details than what is common on election posters. Overall, the posters are best characterized as collages. A collage may be defined as a picture in which fragments of paper, photographs, and other objects of varying sorts and forms are arranged and pasted on to a new surface, also frequently coupled with painted segments. A collage, moreover, refers to the technique applied to create such a picture (Chilvers 2009; Clarke and Clarke 2010a).

As previously mentioned, the collage commonly is associated with avant-garde artwork, particularly Dada or Surrealism. Like Dada artworks, these posters also exhibit elements that signify the use of chance as an artistic principle, as well as indifference to conventional aesthetic principles or norms in society, and irony: In general, the posters' composition consists of uneven clippings of text and drawings, and photographs and captions of different sizes that have been arranged apparently at random with no regard to vertical or horizontal lines. That is, by chance. For example, on the 1979 poster one column of photos is deliberately displaced, and text and images appear to have been added by chance on the 1990 poster. This leaves a messy impression. The posters also appear to be homemade and every element on them done by hand. Most of the posters are without color or monochrome, emphasizing their authentic and primitive appearances. The various elements on the posters also seem to have been prepared and pasted in a careless manner. Altogether, the disorganized arrangement of these elements creates a crowded composition and indicates an indifference to conventional aesthetic and compositional principles.

Moreover, apart from the 1987 poster, all of them include more than one image of Haugaard. He appears as the main motif and in smaller, differently sized images placed randomly on the posters. He is dressed in different outfits seemingly chosen by chance: sometimes in a suit and tie; sometimes with glasses or a pipe; sometimes wearing sunglasses, a hat, or beanie; and sometimes even as a woman. I will examine some of these images more closely later. Furthermore, some of the images are not even of Haugaard, but of seemingly random people in random situations (e.g., people sitting around a table, or a man dressed in women's underwear). Most, if not all, images violate the expectations of the genre, as they confuse the recipient and seem to have no viable function: Why include so

many images of him? Why does he dress up in most of them? And what are we to make of the images of other unknown people? Usually, election posters only contain photos or elements that are part of the story they tell and thus support their social action. In contrast, these images do not appear to have any function on the poster other than obscuring its purpose.

The posters also contain a lot of text; most of it is handwritten, which adds to the homemade appearance. For instance, the heading on the 1994 poster, “Nu eller aldrig” (“Now or never”), is written in letters with faces or hands, which indicates a playful and childish attitude. Apart from the headings, the handwritten text is for the most part small, written at an angle, and therefore hard to read. Some of this text is captions; some of it is placed in speech bubbles; some of it is textual fragments from the newspaper or elsewhere; and some of it does not seem to belong to any image but is simply supplementary.

In addition to photos and text, the posters contain many smaller details, primarily handmade drawings. On the 1990 poster, for example, a footbath, a chicken, a house, and fish have been drawn by hand between the images placed in the bottom. These random elements do not enter the poster’s message or argumentation and are thus inconsistent with the genre.

Two additional details are noteworthy, because they deviate significantly from the genre: On the 1979 poster a drawing of a naked woman appears in the top right corner. The drawing is not only unfitting, but also reflects the sender’s intention to provoke. A nude drawing on an election poster is a deliberate provocative act that violates decorum and thus sabotages the generic purpose of the poster.

Another example of SABAE’s provocative style is found on the 1984 poster. In the top right corner, an image of Haugaard’s penis ‘wearing’ sunglasses and ‘smoking’ a cigarette has been inserted.³⁸ The caption next to the image anchors it: “Tag sagen i egen hånd” (“Take the matter into your hands”). Although it is hard to tell what the image shows (unless you know what to look for), it nevertheless reflects the sender’s intention to provoke and shock—also a Dada characteristic.

³⁸ Haugaard himself reveals in his autobiography that it is a photograph of his penis. The photo was first intended as the main motif on the poster, but in the end Haugaard and Smith got cold feet and decided only to include it in a much smaller version (Haugaard 1999, 28-29).

Altogether, the visual expression and formal characteristics of SABAE's posters indicate that the posters are parodic uptakes. They contain enough codes similar to the genre enabling us to recognize the posters as election posters, but at the same time they stylistically confront the genre. Thus, the ironic play with conventions in the posters signals the sender's parodic intention (Hutcheon 1985, 8). By visually deconstructing election posters, SABAE sabotages the purpose of the genre, namely to endorse a candidate or political viewpoint. Visually, it seems, the purpose is rather to provoke than to promote Haugaard.

Self-representation: ethos and persona

A closer examination of Haugaard's self-representation on the posters also unveils more differences than similarities with the genre. Generally, the posters do not represent Haugaard as a serious political candidate, as one would expect. In one image on the 1979 poster, for example, Haugaard poses as someone who has "skidt i bukserne" ("shit in his pants"). In the image, Haugaard is holding his nose, looking displeased, and wavy lines have even been added to indicate the foul smell. Such a representation is far from dignified and hardly emphasizes the integrity of a political candidate running for election. Rather, the image displays a childish character deliberately represented in a compromising situation that damages his ethos. Contrary to the advice expressed by ancient rhetoricians to show restraint when raising laughter, Haugaard's provocative images (including the one of his penis) display him as anything but a gentleman or "a man of finish, accomplishment and taste" (Cicero 1942, Book II, pt. 236). It deliberately sabotages the purpose of a portrait on election posters, namely to build the candidate's ethos.

Similarly, the main motifs of Haugaard on the following two posters do not resemble a political candidate either: The 1981 poster arbitrarily depicts Haugaard in uneven dimensions—a large close-up of him on a tiny body—and the 1984 poster displays Haugaard dressed as a woman for no apparent reason. In his autobiography, Haugaard reveals that his female alter ego was one of several attempts he made at creating his political persona (Haugaard 1999, 16). Perhaps the smaller images of him in various disguises in the photo collages (on the 1984 poster or 1988 poster) are other attempts. Regardless, the purpose of most of the images of Haugaard seems to be to represent him as the *least* attractive candidate, since neither of these images reflects well on him. In terms of

Functional Theory, they hardly represent Haugaard as preferable to his opponents (Benoit 2007).

In contrast, the image of Haugaard dressed in a suit and tie while holding a baby on the 1987 poster resembles an image of a political candidate.³⁹ The ethos appeal is established both through text and image: The main motif anchors the heading written in red, "Fremtiden i trygge hænder" ("The future in safe hands"), and represents him as a political candidate with strong family values and thus a strong sense of responsibility (*arête*). This is also the first poster to contain color, which is used to emphasize the message of the heading and thereby its connection to the main motif of Haugaard with his son: The warm red color signals love and in this case both a caring father, who will keep his son safe, and a politician, who cares about the future of his country. Thus, the image of Haugaard is a visual metaphor that rests upon an emotional appeal, as he visually demonstrates that the future of Denmark is in safe hands with him.

Given the poster's overall visual expression, however, it stylistically confronts the conventional representation of a politician on an election poster: Dressed formally in a suit and tie, Haugaard imitates the generic look of a politician who attempts to win votes by appealing to traditional values such as tradition and family. Haugaard's posing with a baby marks an ironic attempt at invoking emotions through exaggeration (Hutcheon 1994, 156-157). The social action of this election poster is to expose and mock politicians' stereotypical representation.

The main motif of Haugaard on the following poster in 1988, "disguised as a used-car dealer," in his own words, is also motivated by a specific image of a politician (Haugaard 1999, 32). Its heading, "En ærlig mand" ("An honest man"), functions as relay: the Rolls Royce signals wealth and pride, and the sly look on Haugaard's face suggests that he is not the "honest man" proclaimed in the heading. Thus, text and image complement each other and together create a new meaning. Jointly, they mark an incongruity thereby alerting recipients to irony, i.e., Hutcheon's third ironic marker. On the face of it, heading and image appear to harm Haugaard's ethos, as these combined represent him as someone who is not trustworthy. This representation furthermore seems to defeat the purpose of an election poster, because why would anyone vote for a dishonest man?

³⁹ Haugaard notes in his autobiography that he is holding his newborn son in the image (Haugaard 1999, 29).

However, the obviously ironic representation of Haugaard invites the recipient to reconstruct the message once more: Haugaard is not an actual political candidate or politician, but an honest man, who exposes 'real' politicians as dishonest. Thus, it illustrates an ironic double movement going back and forth between 'I know that you know that I am only playing,' as Booth might put it (see e.g., Booth 1974, 57): Haugaard 'knows' that recipients 'know' that he is only playing a dishonest politician, while he is in fact an honest man, not like a politician. If recipients arrive at this interpretation, they may ascribe Haugaard a higher ethos, if they support his satiric imitation of a politician. As such, Haugaard will have proven himself a competent ironist (Isager 2003), whose political persona mirrors politicians as many voters see them: untrustworthy. Thus, the poster functions as an indirect attack on politicians, thereby corresponding with typical campaign messages (Benoit 2007).

Overall, neither of the images of Haugaard represents him as a serious political candidate, but in most cases as a buffoon in primitive and ill fitting disguises. As a result, he undermines his ethos and obstructs the generic purpose of an election poster. However, if recipients are amused by Haugaard's parodies, they may thus identify with him: As Meyer explains, identification can be achieved through jokes that reveal an embarrassing mistake the speaker made, for instance. The speaker signals to the audience that he is equal to them, thereby ingratiating himself (Meyer 2000, 318). Similarly, Haugaard ingratiates himself through his parodies and signals that he is not a superior figure, just like in his election events. If recipients recognize and support this parody, they may attribute him a high ethos (Isager 2003).

Verbal substance: arguments and statements

Last point of comparison with the genre is the election posters' arguments and statements. The analysis so far has already revealed some insights about how and what the posters argue and the social actions they fulfill. Therefore, some of the following examples will expand on these, and some of them will add new ones.

Looking once more at the 1979 poster, we find that its heading and sub-heading, "Advarsel!! Retten til at arbejde = retten til slaveri" ("Warning!! The right to work = the right to slavery") neither anchor the 12 images of Haugaard, nor reflect the relay-function; the random images of Haugaard posing as a marine biologist or someone who is happy do

not add meaning to the slogan, nor help recipients reach a new meaning. This discrepancy between headings and images weakens the persuasiveness of the poster and obscures the purpose of the poster.

The heading itself is accentuated through use of exclamation marks and large ‘dramatic’ letters that indicate the urgency and importance of its message. As previously outlined, SABAE was motivated by an aversion against left wing parties’ new stance on employment and the need for more work places. The heading is, thus, a response to this. Claiming contrarily that to work is actually equivalent to slaving away for an employer is an act of provocation. To provoke, in other words, appears to be the social action of this poster.

The overall argument on the 1984 poster is more obscure: The poster carries the title “Gift” (“Married”), implying, it seems, that if you are married you should “vote Jacob,” as it states in the bottom of the poster. However, this text—the title and invitation to vote in the bottom —does not clearly anchor the image of Haugaard: Why would the message “Married” necessitate that Haugaard dresses up as a woman? The text does not fulfill the function of relay either, since text and image do not (effectively) complement each other: Together, the two forms of expression do not help recipients create a new meaning. From yet another angle, the title in Danish, “Gift,” could also mean “Poison,” but the image of Haugaard as a woman does not support this interpretation in particular either.⁴⁰ The lack of coherence between heading and image (and images in the collages) lessens the persuasiveness of the poster.

The message on the 1981 poster is by comparison clearer. The heading “Gør gode tider bedre...” (“Make good times better...”) repeats a well-known election slogan introduced by the Social Democratic Party at the National election in 1960. Back then, the economy was increasing and unemployment was dropping. It was thus a prosperous time of progress and optimism (Schädler Andersen et al. 2012, 4:11,18). Contrarily, in 1981, a sense of crisis prevailed. As a consequence of the international oil crises, in part, Danish economy struggled with a substantial deficit on the balance of payments. This resulted in increasing unemployment, among other things (Schädler Andersen et al. 2010, 5:23–24). Hence, in 1981, times were not good.

⁴⁰ Adding to this, the image of Haugaard does not correspond with his private life either, as he was married in 1982, not 1984 (Haugaard 1999, 25).

Re-using this slogan therefore signals irony through “contradiction/incongruity” (Hutcheon 1994, 156-157). The three periods following the slogan also constitute graphic markers, that is, another “warning signal” of irony (ibid). The close-up of Haugaard smiling anchors the ‘positive’ message of the slogan, but further emphasizes the irony, since such a positive attitude is incongruent with the somber tone in the political debate at the time. Thus, the parodic slogan rests on an ironic inversion that is used to point out an absurd and undesirable situation by implicitly targeting the Social Democratic Party, which was the party of government in both 1961 and 1981, for not making good times better after all.

The 1990 poster also targets the political left wing: The title, “Gør din pligt: Kræv din ret” (“Do your duty: Demand your right”) is an alteration of the Danish working class movement’s slogan: “Gør din pligt og krævn din ret” (“Do your duty and demand your right”). The original slogan was launched in the early days of the movement (circa 1871) and addressed its ideology: the fight for equal political rights and duties for both working class and upper class (Christensen 2002, 227). The slogan expressed, in other words, that you only had rights if you also had done your duty.

Contrarily, SABAE’s slogan expresses that your duty *is* to demand your right. The ironic inversion resulting in a complete change of meaning is achieved through a simple substitution of a colon that effectively sabotages the slogan. Hence, the meaning would change entirely, if the colon had been a period. The slogan thereby cancels the duty-part, leaving in only the right, and thus matches SABAE’s work-shy profile.

Last, apart from headings, slogans, captions, and election promises, the posters also contain a multitude of random statements, such as “Skyd genvej til en bedre tilværelse” (“Take a shortcut to a better life”), “Den der graver en grav for andre blir træt i armen” (“Someone who digs a grave for others will get a tired arm”), or “Retten til at være grim og dum!” (“The right to be ugly and stupid!”). These meaningless phrases have no function and are like much of the text on the posters superfluous in the sense that they do not help recipients make sense of the poster. Thus, the overload of text and information creates confusion rather than clarity. It, too, counteracts the social action of an election poster.

As has been established by now, SABAE’s uptakes exhibit a multitude of generic violations, which indicate that the posters were not intended to fulfill the social action of the genre. Common to all posters is that they are deliberate attempts at sabotaging the genre and the

overall purpose seems to be to provoke. By including an excess of random objects and information on the posters, and by not representing Haugaard as a serious candidate, SABAE counteract the function of an election poster. In doing so, they debunk the authority of the genre by deconstructing it.

Overall, the posters may be seen as artworks: Like Dada artists, SABAE has not produced these election posters with a particular outcome in mind or to achieve any particular purpose. The posters are their “gratuitous act.” Reconstructing the irony therefore leaves little result, because the point primarily is to sabotage and smash all expectations. The result is a non-result. The goal is for the most part not to be understood, but to remain not understood. Their parodic uptakes of election posters thus are designed to confuse and provoke, not to inform or persuade.

Although the posters do not substantively and stylistically fulfill the situational demands of the genre, they nevertheless can provide some indications of Haugaard’s electoral success. It therefore is useful to consider how the posters and in particular Haugaard’s representation develop over the years and how they may have been rhetorically effective:

The main motifs on the first three posters from 1979, 1981, and 1984 represent Haugaard as random characters in random outfits (e.g., as a marine biologist in a diving mask in 1979, as a large head on a tiny body in 1981, and as a woman in 1984). Since these images of him do not resemble a political candidate, it is only from the generic context that we recognize the object of his parodic representations. The election posters and the social actions they aim to fulfill are, in other words, hard to decode. The primitive visual expression of the posters and Haugaard’s buffoonish appearances and deliberate breaches of decorum, particularly reflect SABAE’s avant-garde anti-style used to obscure the point of the poster, namely that there is no point. It is also used to provoke the closed leftist environment in Aarhus (primarily VS), hence the “warning!!” against work on the 1979 poster and the parodic left-wing slogan on the 1981 poster.

From 1987 and onwards a shift seems to occur in Haugaard’s representation. Although the posters overall still reflect the Dada characteristics seen in the earlier posters, the main motifs of Haugaard dressed in a suit and tie (but not dressed up) resemble a political candidate more. His parody of a politician is, in other words, more recognizable. As mentioned earlier, he made several attempts at creating his political persona. The

photograph on the first page of this case study shows the look he decided on: Haugaard wore a suit, including a vest, he had specially made in Malaysia, out of Brazilian coffee sacks, a multicolored tie, and a broad brimmed hat. He referred to the unusual suit as his “Yves *Sack* Laurent” (my emphasis), alluding humorously to the fashion brand “Ives Saint Laurent.” In his words, it “symbolized the bank director and garbage bin all in one. This suit was a true work of art and the voters loved it” (Haugaard 1999, 42). The unusual material had a bathetic effect on the traditional attire and thereby confronted the politician’s traditional “uniform.” It represented, so to speak, the two roles Haugaard was merging: the buffoon and the politician.

In other words, Haugaard’s use of irony in creating his political persona stabilized in the last election campaigns: Since his parody of a politician became more recognizable, recipients were not invited to reconstruct his ironic representation more than once. Moreover, based on his increasing number of votes these years, Haugaard proved himself a competent ironist, as voters supported his parody, thus ascribing him a higher ethos (Isager 2003). As such, his parody may also have helped create identification with his voters: By recognizing and supporting it, voters shared the experience of laughing at an agreed-upon target—politicians—with Haugaard (Meyer 2000, 318).

Thus, from 1987 and onwards, Haugaard and SABAE take a step closer to the genre. This aspect suggests that the posters are no longer only intended for the leftist environment in Aarhus, but also for a wider national audience. Haugaard’s shift in representation therefore could be related to the celebrity status he gains in Denmark in the second half of the 1980s. At this point in time, Haugaard is a popular figure known for a sense of humor with a wide appeal. This sense of humor also is reflected in the posters: Like the election promises, a mild form of satire that is not marked by aggressive attacks and is less divisive than unifying characterizes SABAE’s slogans and Haugaard’s visual representation in general. His use of self-irony, for example by appearing inferior or by pledging to fight for the right to be ugly and stupid, also takes the edge of any attack.

Moreover, one may see Haugaard’s celebrity status reflected on the last election poster: In the main motif he appears as himself, smiling, and not in character, and the heading, “Now or never,” is a direct reference also to himself and his decision not to run again—not to something political.

The number of votes Haugaard received at each election also reflects his shifts of representation. The numbers are modest the first three elections and rise significantly from 1987 until his successful election in 1994:

Year	1979	1981	1984	1987	1988	1990	1994
Number of votes	797	558	676	2,275	3,221	8,717	23,253

Thus, it seems that Haugaard's celebrity status and popular appeal—a result of his mild, inclusive, and folksy humor, also reflected in his election meetings—impacted his win positively. Without wanting a result, SABAE achieved the ultimate result, as the election posters and campaign turned out to be much more effective than anticipated—or intended.

The election in 1994 and Haugaard's election term

By 10 p.m. on the evening of the election, 21st of September 1994, it was clear: Haugaard had received 23,253 votes and been elected to Parliament. His initial reaction was complete shock—he never saw it coming, and neither did his campaign manager. The night developed into a huge party, Haugaard recalls, and all he could do was play along (Haugaard 1999, 42). Outside his front door a crowd of reporters awaited, so Haugaard proclaimed:

I had anticipated [the outcome of] the election, since it was 'now or never.' Considering all the things I have promised, it couldn't go wrong. This is still a joke, and I will keep it going in the Folketing. I am surprised that it is possible to get elected based on the kind of nonsense I have said. I wonder how many other Members of the Folketing say nonsense without us knowing it. The voters have definitely protested and I promise that I will carry on as court jester. (Bresemann 1994b)

But Haugaard did not “carry on as court jester.” At first, he attempted to stay neutral in political matters that required his vote, but he soon learned that this actually was not an option. Already during his first speech in Parliament a few weeks later, it became apparent

that Haugaard did not intend to challenge the Folketing.⁴¹ For once, he appeared serious and he would stay this way throughout his time in Parliament (Jersild 1994). As MP, Haugaard took on the role as “political apprentice,” as Paul Smith phrases it (Øvig Knudsen 2001). Overall, he paid careful attention not to interfere with the procedures of Parliament and to signal that he took these seriously (Christensen 1999, 177). “I had this feeling that politics was deadly dangerous,” Haugaard states in the biography, as he had observed that smarter and far more politically savvy men than him had previously failed in politics and suffered serious consequences (ibid). His level of ambition was therefore “to make it out of Christiansborg alive” (Haugaard 1999, 69).

During his election period, Haugaard therefore only gained limited political influence. He even considered resigning his seat during his last year in Parliament, but ended up staying until the next call for election in February 1998, approximately six months before the end of the election term. He never ran for re-election.

⁴¹ The speech (in Danish) is included in Haugaard’s autobiography (1999, 55-58).

4. Jón Gnarr: an anarcho-surrealist in City Hall



Photo by: Hörður Sveinssen.

Introduction to case study

“Why choose second best when you can have The Best?” This slogan and others of its like were originally invented for a comedy sketch show featuring the Icelandic comedian Jón Gnarr in character as a “simple-minded local politician” (Gnarr 2014, 47). However, the character never appeared on television. Instead, Gnarr ended up performing the role as politician in real life when he was elected Mayor of Reykjavík in 2010. He won the election for city council with his newly founded political party, The Best Party, *Besti flokkurinn*, and was mayor for a full term, from 2010 to 2014. This case study explores how a comedian with no former political experience, who invented a political party “out of pure fun” in his own words (Gnarr 2014, 80), managed to get elected for one of the most powerful positions in Iceland.

The chapter begins with a description of Iceland’s financial crisis—a context of significance to understanding the general atmosphere in the country and the political turbulence and instability that characterized the Icelandic society at the time. Following this section, I present Gnarr’s background and motivations for founding The Best Party and proceed to expand on The Best Party, its “anarcho-surrealist” profile, and its members.

Next, I characterize The Best Party’s election campaign, starting with its campaign performance strategy, which the various election genres and material reflect in different ways. I continue to examine The Best Party’s election promises—one of the most central genres of the campaign—and then delve into the digital campaign. Since The Best Party primarily campaigned online, I examine four digital genres or platforms employed in the campaign: Gnarr’s blog, The Best Party’s website, its Facebook page, and videos uploaded on YouTube, including a political ad. Following the website analysis I also analyze two texts posted on the website, namely The Best Party’s party program and so-called moral code. Through these analyses I am able to uncover how and why these artifacts violate the expectations that accompany the genres, and how these violations may have impacted The Best Party’s win.

The chapter is concluded with a brief description of the election and Gnarr’s election term as Mayor of Reykjavík.

Historical context: Iceland's financial crisis

In late 2008 three of Iceland's major banks collapsed. The loans and assets of these banks had in total grown to more than 9 times the national gross domestic product, and Iceland was threatened with national bankruptcy (Úlfarsson 2010). The impact of the financial crisis was significant: The value of the national currency plummeted, making the import twice as expensive, while inflation and unemployment escalated, making many house owners unable to pay their debts (Gudmundsson 2013). In November, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) took financial charge of Iceland. Frequent public demonstrations followed the economic collapse, principally in the center of Reykjavík, Iceland's capital. The protests were directed at the bankers and the government that had allowed the crisis to build, and they grew more and more violent (Durrenberger and Pálsson 2015, xix). Equipped with drums, pots, and pans, people demonstrated loudly in front of the Parliament building, *Althingi*, and confrontations with the police were nearly an everyday occurrence. This so-called 'saucepan revolution' caused the government to resign in January 2009, and the then Prime Minister Geir Haarde was eventually convicted for his part in permitting the crisis to develop (Boyer 2013, 278).

A new left-wing government composed of the Social-Democratic Alliance and the Left-Green Party was elected in April 2009. But very little changed, since the IMF left the new government with limited power, demanding drastic economic measures (Gudmundsson 2013; Boyer 2013, 278). Like their predecessors, the new leaders attempted to convince the citizens of Iceland to accept debt liability for the failed banks to avoid international sanctions. The new government therefore was not seen to be that different from the preceding. These circumstances were a great source of the public's sense of betrayal and discontentment with their politicians, and in the words of the Icelandic author and frequent participant in public debate, Andri Snær Magnason the Icelandic people lost their faith in the entire political class (Weiss 2010).

The Icelandic writer Einar Már Guðmundsson also encapsulates this frustration felt by the public in an essay in which he rhetorically asks, why the wide population must carry the responsibility for the financial crisis brought on by the capitalist class, just so the capitalist class can carry on as if nothing had happened? (Guðmundsson 2011, 54). The central question at this point in time was, in other words, whose interests carry the most weight: The interests of the financial institutions or the public's?

In addition, Icelandic politics was challenged on a regional level: In the past four years, from 2006 to 2010, the Reykjavík city council had had four different mayors. The coalition between the left and center parties had failed, leaving a fragmented council struggling to collaborate and establish agreements (Sigurjónsdóttir 2013, 99). Furthermore, the capitol city was seriously indebted. Adding to the consequences of the economic collapse, which the entire country was dealing with, the city of Reykjavík faced serious problems.

At this time of public insecurity and political instability, Gnarr brought together a group of artists, actors, and musicians, when he formed The Best Party. His run for election to the Reykjavík city council on 29th of May 2010 caused a shift in the political landscape—a much-welcomed shift, as we shall see.

The Best Party

The founder: Jón Gnarr

In a country of 320,000 it is not so difficult to become a celebrity, and in his own words Gnarr was famous by the age of 14, simply because he stood out physically in his Mohawk hairstyle and with a ring through the nose (Gnarr 2014, 12). In his youth, Gnarr was a punker and was often beaten up on account of being a punker, a redhead, and weird (Guðmundsson 2011, 57). He was a latecomer in the family and grew up resisting any kind of rule imposed on him, either by his parents or by the school system. A psychiatrist diagnosed him *maladaptio*, “a fancy word for ‘retarded,’” Gnarr writes, and he never graduated from school (Gnarr 2014, 19, 31).

He therefore became a “self-made man,” in his own words (Magnússon 2010). He has had a variety of jobs, e.g., as a taxi driver, a psychiatric nurse, and a creative director in an advertising agency (Gnarr 2014, 35, 104). But foremost, he considers himself an artist: “I am my own subject. I am the only thing I have to work with” (Magnússon 2010).

Gnarr began his career in comedy in his late teens with his friend, Sigurjón Kjartansson—a founding member of the rock band HAM, whose members ended up joining The Best Party, as I elaborate on shortly. In the middle of the 1990s, Gnarr started to make a name for himself as a stand-up comedian: He and Kjartansson formed a radio duo, *Tvíhöfði*, in 1994, and also worked together on the popular comedy show *Fóstbræður* on *Stöð 2*, a national television channel, as writers and actors from 1997. Gnarr explains in an

interview that a record high number of viewers unsubscribed from the channel, apparently because people took offense to the show (Magnússon 2010). This reaction was not new to him: “There have been very harsh responses to almost everything I’ve participated in,” Gnarr further notes. Moreover, Gnarr also has written, produced, and starred in several movies of which his most famous are *The Icelandic Dream* and *A Man like Me* (see e.g., IMDb 2017b).⁴²

Thus, by the time Gnarr formed The Best Party in 2009 he was a well-known stand-up comedian, actor, and writer in Iceland. He had never been active in politics, however, and had never been interested in politics either—not until the financial crash, as he explains in an interview: “Then I just felt I’d had enough of these [politicians]. After the collapse and its aftermath, I started reading the local news websites and watching the news and political talk shows—and it filled me with so much frustration. Eww! So I wanted to do something, to fuck the system. To change it around and impact it somehow” (Magnússon 2010). Gnarr’s exigence, in Bitzer’s terms, for founding The Best Party was thus the financial crisis and a dislike or distrust of established politicians. “So what do you do when you have to choose between two options, both of which are equally bad? You invent a third” (Gnarr 2014, 46). And just like that, Gnarr founded The Best Party as a nonprofit organization (ibid, 65).

The Best Party profile and members

The Best Party was, in Gnarr’s words, “an anarcho-surrealist party, combining the best bits of anarchism and surrealism. And it’s always been my political conviction, really, anarchism and surrealism” (Magnússon 2010). Accordingly, Gnarr also describes himself as an anarchist, adhering to a non-violent form of anarchism (Gnarr 2014, 29-30). I will expand on Surrealism shortly.

Anarchism may be understood as a political philosophy that emanated as an upshot of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution (Shatz 2011, 725). Although anarchist schools of thought can vary significantly, making it hard to pin down a stable definition of anarchism (Franks 2013), it often is characterized as a non-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian ideology that is commonly considered an extreme left-wing ideology (Ward

⁴² Adding to this, Gnarr recently starred in the Icelandic comedy TV series, *Borgarstjórnin*, in 2016 in which he plays the Mayor of Reykjavík (IMDb 2017a).

2004, 1–3). It promotes self-governed, stateless societies and “contains a positive vision of the kind of community it expects to arise when political authority is eliminated” (Shatz 2011). Achieving individual autonomy and social justice without the interference of a state is central to the anarchist project.

Anarchism also is described as a “radically decentralist theory of political action” and the collective of anarchists as “an activist group which organizes itself, always at a local level” with a revolutionary tendency (Munton 2010). This description aligns well with the organization of The Best Party: The first members of the party primarily were Gnarr’s friends, whom he had to convince to join. Like Gnarr, none of them had a political background. Additionally, like Gnarr, a number of them were public figures in Iceland, particularly in the music and arts scene, including Einar Örn Benediktsson, who was lead singer in the alternative rock band Sugarcubes (with Björk), and Óttarr Proppé, a musician from the rock band HAM. Both became city council members. Adding to this, a second member of HAM, Sigurður Björn Blöndal, became Gnarr’s assistant and policy advisor, once Gnarr was mayor (Gnarr 2014, 34-35).

Thus, The Best Party was a non-hierarchical activist group of performing artists without political experience and perhaps not even much interest.⁴³ This understanding of The Best Party also matches anthropologist (and sister of Óttarr Proppé) Hulda Proppé’s characterization of The Best Party as “a social movement of the avant-garde, a movement of people living on the cultural and political margin” (Proppé 2015, 81). Gnarr’s wish to “fuck the system” and “change it around and impact it someway,” as quoted earlier, expresses the revolutionary tendency of the party: He intended to challenge political authority and make room for a different kind of community. Accordingly, on election night, after The Best Party was declared winner, Gnarr gave a speech that ended with the words: “Welcome to the revolution!” (Proppé 2015, 80).

A third central figure in The Best Party was campaign manager Heiða Helgadóttir. She handled the practical and organizational aspects of the party work and became Gnarr’s right hand and political consultant in the council (Gnarr 2014, 68). In an interview, she expresses the potential impact of the party at the time of its start-up: “I thought it would

⁴³ In fact, even after two and half years as mayor, Gnarr declared in an update on Facebook on 19th of December 2012: “I don’t see myself as a politician. I’m a political activist” (qtd. in Sigurjónsdóttir 2013, 105).

immediately serve a purpose simply to spread some joy into an atmosphere that was so crippling and dry and fearful” (Pendakis 2013). Laughter and joy were thus central to the The Best Party’s project, and much of this “joy” came from its use of surrealistic techniques in their election material and campaign. Before I trace The Best Party’s election campaign, I therefore go over some basic definitions of Surrealism.

On Surrealism

Like the Dada movement, Surrealism dates back to the 20th century. It sprang from Dada as a literary and artistic movement and “was conceived as a revolutionary mode of thought and action in politics, philosophy, and psychology as well as literature and art” (Birch and Hooper 2012). Like Dada artists, the Surrealists expressed their art through the collage or montage, juxtaposing random objects or images in surprising ways and coupling unrelated objects, thus signifying an emphasis on chance and arbitrariness (ibid). But in contrast to Dada, Surrealism stressed “the positive rather than the nihilistic” (Clarke and Clarke 2010b). As we shall see, positivity is a distinct characteristic of The Best Party’s election material and of Gnarr’s attitude when in character as a political candidate. Adding to this, Helgadóttir also describes Gnarr as a Surrealist, as she notes: “So much of his work comes from a fear of boredom, fear of an everyday life without joy and surprises” (Pendakis 2013).

Central to surrealistic artwork is the notion of *automatism*—a notion originating from the French poet and principal figure of the movement, André Breton (Foster 1993, xv). In his “Manifesto of Surrealism” from 1924, he relates Surrealism with free association including *automatic writing*—a process, in which all rational, aesthetic, or moral concerns are disregarded. The uninterrupted flow of writing, or stream of consciousness, was thought to release the *unconscious*—another central notion to the Surrealists (Buchanan 2010). Their work built on Sigmund Freud’s theories of the unconscious and its relation to dreams, and represented a quest for human emancipation. Accordingly, the Surrealists created boundless worlds without regard of time, place, or space in their often provocative works to blur the boundaries between dream and reality, art and life (Buchanan 2010; Foster 1993, 7).

Blurring the boundaries between what is real or serious and what is not is a surrealistic feature that is particularly prominent in The Best Party’s election campaign

and what could be referred to as their overall campaign performance strategy, which I will go over shortly. The analyses also contain more examples of how surrealistic traits manifest.

Gnarr for Mayor: the election campaign 2010

More than one third of Iceland's population lives in Reykjavík, which puts the mayor of the capitol city in a powerful position, notably more so than in most other (larger) countries. In fact, when the American singer Lady Gaga proclaimed: "I love the Mayor of Iceland," after meeting Gnarr in 2012 in Reykjavík, she was not far off. But since the polls showed less than 1 percent support of The Best Party approximately six months before the municipal election that took place on 29th of May 2010, no one at this point expected or worried that a group of artists would take charge of city hall.

The Best Party primarily campaigned online via social media, as I will go over later, but was also present in mainstream media throughout the campaign, particularly as it rose in the polls. Close to the election politicians and political bloggers on Iceland generally expressed concern about the predicted win of The Best Party—a party with no experience or knowledge of council affairs (*mbl.is* 2010). Early on, however, its campaign was considered a joke, especially among established politicians and political candidates (Proppé 2015, 81). This was, at least in part, because of Gnarr's and The Best Party's performance overall during the campaign, and in part because of the party's unusual election promises and material. Before analyzing how the party campaigned online, I therefore examine this performance and afterwards The Best Party's election promises.

Gnarr and The Best Party's campaign performance strategy

Originally, the idea for The Best Party was invented for a sketch show, as previously mentioned, along with the character Gnarr would appear as throughout the campaign: "a simple-minded local politician with an autocratic demeanor and completely absurd campaign promises. His motto and party logo was 'Thumbs up!' He himself an odd mixture of Groucho Marx, Tony Blair, and an American used car salesman" (Gnarr 2014, 47). Acting as a "simpleton," as Gnarr refers to the role in an interview, was a strategic choice designed to catch attention, among other things (Magnússon 2010). This persona manifested itself in

various ways, both in Gnarr's performance as a political candidate in debates and mainstream media and in the election material, as we shall see later.

For instance: Shortly after his creation of The Best Party in November 2009, Gnarr states in an interview that he did so because "I have long wanted to have power and a good salary" and "to get in a position where I can help my friends" (*Visir.is* 2009). A news article in early February 2010 likewise cites The Best Party's press release, which declares that the sole objective of The Best Party is to get Gnarr a comfortable office and an assistant—and "in order to accomplish this goal the party applies deception and empty promises" (*mbl.is* 2010). Gnarr furthermore declares that the party will not "keep its promises" and that he intends to step back as mayor "if the jobs gets boring" (*Pressan.is* 2010).

Thus, part of his act as a simpleton meant admitting that he had no political visions and that the sole purpose of running for election was to help out himself and his friends. In terms of Functional Theory, Gnarr offers no policy statements, only empty promises, and highlights the exact opposite (incongruous) values commonly sought after in politicians (honesty, integrity) (Benoit 2007). The social action of his ironic act seems to be to expose and criticize politicians for serving their own interests rather than the interests of society.

Moreover, Gnarr openly admitted that he had no formal education or interest in politics, and he shared unusual and embarrassing stories about himself in the media, for example, that he at the age of four would ask strangers "if they had been fucking" (Magnússon 2010). In other words: Gnarr shared the type of information about himself that public figures normally would not disclose freely—information that undermined his ethos as a suitable political candidate. It moreover violates the expectations people have to candidates employing the election campaign genre. In general, it made people question whether he was a serious candidate at all.

Creating a sense of uncertainty and confusion, however, was part of the party's strategic act to secure the media and public's attention. For this end, The Best Party also used techniques characteristic of Surrealism to obscure the lines between true and false, real and unreal. For example, Gnarr explains that he had various ways of disrupting his interviews: by walking out in the middle, not replying to questions, or making absurd statements (Gnarr 2014, 65). Sigurjónsdóttir, too, observes: "The media found it difficult to interview Jón Gnarr because he was very inconsistent in his answers" (2013, 103). Heiða Helgadóttir also mentions in an interview that they would make a false announcement of

where their press conference was taking place, also to draw people's attention (Pendakis 2013).

The documentary moreover shows footage from a debate between representatives from all parties at the University of Reykjavík close to the election, which also reflects Gnarr's surreal play with roles and expectations. In his speech, Gnarr first expresses doubt as to whether he really wants pursue the office as mayor and concludes: "I have decided to withdraw The Best Party from the city election." After two seconds of silence, he admits: "Just kidding. Now it's finally getting exciting and I have risen from the ashes like the bird Felix. Thank you. Go Reykjavík!" (Úlfarsson 2010). Mistaking the mythical bird Phoenix for Felix was intentional, as Gnarr explains: "I was just waiting for some blogger type to correct me on that. That gets the party press and exposure, and as soon as they do, I can stand aside, laugh and let the facts or essence of what I was saying do the talking" (Magnússon 2010).

Gnarr's act thus rested on unstable irony (Booth 1974): The audience was constantly invited to reconstruct the meaning behind Gnarr's ironic act as he shifted between sincerity, irony, and Surrealism. *Wall Street Journal* similarly characterizes Gnarr's performance as political candidate in terms of a "split personality" (Casey 2010). This renders his ethos dynamic due to the confusion he likely, and intentionally, caused among people (Isager 2003).

According to Gaukur Úlfarsson, who aside from directing the documentary "Gnarr" (2010) apparently also acted as campaign manager for The Best Party, Gnarr's shifting personas or "split personality" was the result of a strategy called "keeping them guessing" (Sigurjónsdóttir 2013, 102-103). In an unpublished interview with Sigurjónsdóttir, he disclosed that the main purpose throughout the campaign was to maintain the media's and the public's attention by constantly keeping them wondering what The Best Party's platform was and what kind of politician Gnarr was—if he really was one at all (ibid). It was a risky strategy as it left recipients unsure of The Best Party's intentions, which is not a common function of a campaign strategy. The analyses also illustrate this strategy in different ways.

Accordingly, Gnarr slipped in and out of his character as a "simple-minded local politician," never allowing people to place him in one category or the other. Therefore, people kept asking: Was Gnarr joking or not? Where did he place himself and The Best

Party politically? Was he really a simpleton? Was he ever actually sincere? And did he really mean that he would only work with people who had seen the American television show *The Wire*?

The Best Party's election promises

Another central aspect of The Best Party's campaign giving cause for confusion and speculations concerning the party's sincerity was its election promises. These are expressed in different election material, including a political ad, "The Best Video," and its party program, both of which I examine later. The Best Party's party platform, which was written by Gnarr and other party members in April 2010 and published on The Best Party website, moreover consists of 13 points or election promises.⁴⁴ Some promises are obviously ironic, some appear serious, and some are hard to decode.

For instance, in the election video, Gnarr promises: "All kinds of things for the unfortunate." The promise is similar to one of The Best Party's slogans, "*Áfram allskonar*," which, according to Proppé, can be translated to "ahead for all kinds" or "ahead for everything," or "all kinds of everything" (Proppé 2015, 87). Neither of these uptakes actually means anything. Thus, they violate the generic function of the election promise, which may be understood as "concrete representations of the broader ideological principles that the parties have staked out" (Vassallo and Wilcox 2006, 415). These promises are as vague as they come.

Furthermore, the phrasing, "All kinds of things," is also found in point 8) of the party platform: "We can promise more cost exemptions than any other party—*because we won't actually try to keep our promises!* So we could promise all kinds of things, no matter what, from free plane tickets for women to free cars for the rural population" (Gnarr 2014, 74, my emphasis). By revealing that it will not try to keep its promises, The Best Party is admitting in advance to "fudging" its speech acts. According to Charlotte Jørgensen, 'fudging speech acts' are "violations of fair argumentation in which arguers communicate

⁴⁴ See appendix E. In Gnarr's autobiography, it does not state where the party platform was published. However, Dominic Boyer notes that The Best Party's "ten-point platform" was published on their website (Boyer 2013, 278). Although the platform consists of 13 points, it was launched as a "ten-point platform"—an obvious clue to irony corresponding to Booth's second clue: "Known error proclaimed" (Booth 1974, 57). Briefly put, the author includes an obvious mistake to signal the use of irony.

manipulatively with regard to the speech acts they perform.” These commonly involve denial of the performed speech act or claim of performing another speech act (C. Jørgensen 2010).

However, in this case, Gnarr promises to break his promises, i.e., his speech act is to admit to fudging other speech acts. Therefore, the promise constitutes a generic violation, since promising to break his promises defeats the purpose of the genre. It also reflects Gnarr’s ironic play with conventions intended to signal the absurdity of making such promises in the first place.

Moreover, Gnarr’s choice of “the unfortunate” as recipients in the promise is not a coincidence. In his autobiography, he observes that during the campaign,

all parties kept their language politically correct. As soon as there was talk of immigrants or women’s equality, they all trotted out their standard formulations, and their waterproof, carefully rehearsed slogans. Meanwhile I took the liberty of saying that the Best Party would also do something for women and girls, and even for the elderly and disabled. For the underdogs, you see. (ibid, 70-71)

The Best Party’s uptakes of such “politically correct” promises are found in several variations in their party platform, e.g.: “We also take women and the elderly seriously,” “Benefits for vulnerable members of society,” and “Free dental treatment for children and the disadvantaged” (ibid, 73-75). Thus, these uptakes mock the kind of political platitudes resulting from one political party trying to exceed another political party in making popular election promises.

Other promises appear serious, however. In the party platform, several pledges center on topics specially related to the financial crisis, for example: “Debt relief for everyone!” and “The banking crash: those responsible are now being asked to pay.” Contrary to the ruling parties at the time that tried to convince the public to accept debt liability, The Best Party’s message was different: “let the people decide—because the people themselves always know best what’s good for them” (Gnarr 2014, 74). By putting in writing what most people felt at the time, The Best Party might have achieved voters’ goodwill (*eunoia*).

Yet, other promises are of a more surrealistic nature. For example, in the election video, Gnarr promises “Disneyland in the Vatsnamyrí area” and “A polar bear for the Reykjavík zoo.”⁴⁵ In The Best Party’s political program he moreover suggests, “training the whales and fish off the Icelandic coasts” (Gnarr 2014, 59). Promises such as these clash with the apparently serious promises just seen and primarily make one wonder how much of what The Best Party says or does actually is real or meant seriously.

In general, The Best Party’s election promises serve a divisive function: They mark a distance between The Best Party and traditional parties, corresponding to the humor function that Meyer calls differentiation—a strategy employed by rhetors to differentiate themselves from opponents, their view from others’, or one group from another (Meyer 2000, 321). This strategy furthermore corresponds to the second and third principle of Functional Theory, which highlights the importance of candidates separating their views and messages from opponents (Benoit 2007). By pointing out contrasts and differences between issues, concerns, or people, the sender simultaneously divides and unifies audiences, since “[h]umor is invoked to make both alliances and distinctions” (Meyer 2000, 321).

These election promises thus may have been rhetorically effective at echoing voters’ frustration with status quo politicians, thereby accomplishing the social function of political humor and gaining voters’ support (votes).

The Best Party’s digital campaign

As previously mentioned, The Best Party’s campaign primarily unfolded on social media, that is, BlogSpot, YouTube, and Facebook (Gnarr 2014, 68). Additionally, Gnarr also created a website for the party. Social media is an umbrella term for social networking websites that allow users to contribute to the content. Interactivity, participation, conversation, and community are among central defining features of such platforms, separating them from other types of communication (Tolstrup 2013, 201; Christiansen 2014, 426). Whereas social networking sites started out as a niche product, they are today

⁴⁵ In an interview, Gnarr explains that the latter mentioned promise actually was meant seriously: “polar bears are widely considered an endangered species, and I honestly believe it would be better to store those that make it over in a zoo, rather than executing them on sight” (Magnússon 2010).

a mass phenomenon, and at present, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and a campaign website “represent the bare minimum in digital campaigning” (Shaw 2018, 82).

In *Politicking Online: The Transformation of Election Campaign Communications*, 2008 is declared “a watershed year” when it comes to the use of online platforms in campaigns in the U.S. presidential election cycle (Panagopoulos 2009, 2). Social networking websites, such as YouTube and Facebook, were employed as a means to reach voters in novel ways through online speech clips, invitations for events and online groups, and announcements in videos. Thus, social media was recognized as a useful tool in political campaigns, providing better room for creativity and activation of voters and supporters, among other things. “[T]he instant nature of social media,” as Shaw writes, “combined with the large number of people engaging, means that the impact of a well-run social media presence is priceless. Social media opens up a world of supporters advocating on [the candidate’s] behalf—something more powerful, genuine, and personal than traditional campaign advertising” (2018, 81-82).

Thus, social media has “become a medium to which campaigns must attend” (Williams and Gulati 2009, 273) and a tool like many others that may help accomplish the overall social action of an election campaign: to maximize the candidate’s number of votes and thereby increase his or her chance of winning the election. While the content and formal features of social networking sites differ, as I will outline in the following subsections, they perform overlapping functions of benefit to a campaign. In general, since social networking sites are user-driven and free, they provide grounds for better reaching voters and turning users into advocates, supporters, and contributors, thereby helping the campaign gain visibility, raise funds, and mobilize support.

Understanding The Best Party’s election campaign therefore requires an analysis of each of these digital genres and social media platforms, and how they were employed in the campaign. In the following subsections on Gnarr’s blog, the Best Party’s campaign website, its Facebook page, and YouTube videos, I first define each genre or platform in terms of substance, form, and the typified social action it performs, then examine its use by The Best Party. Moreover, the analyses consider how these uptakes may have impacted The Best Party’s victory.

The blog as genre and Gnarr's blog

Blogs came into existence in the late 1990s (Trent et al. 2016, 294; Miller & Shepherd 2004, 2009). According to Miller and Shepherd and their study of the blog as genre, definitions of blogs are often grounded in their “reverse chronology, frequent updating, and combination of links with personal commentary” (Miller & Shepherd 2004, np.). The substance or content of blogs is extremely diverse and may be categorized as photo blogs, video blogs, and audio blogs, or grouped as personal, political, movies, entertainment, teen etc. (ibid). Formally, blogs consist of ‘blog posts,’ which are dated entries organized in reverse chronological order that contain a date, an author name, and a link for commentary, among other things. Furthermore, the authors characterize the social action of the blog in terms of self-expression and community development. The blog’s “generic exigence,” they write, is a “widely shared, recurrent need for cultivation and validation of the self.” By publicly expressing one’s personality, bloggers seek self-clarification and self-validation, thereby developing their identity and relations with others.

In terms of election campaigns, blogs can perform various social actions, potentially impacting politics in a number of ways: Blogs can increase media coverage and at the same time provide an alternative to traditional media, thereby enabling campaigns to react to events more quickly than traditional media. Blogs also may help activate citizens by functioning as echo chambers for particular types of news stories (Trent et al. 2016, 294). Moreover, blogs can function as campaign diaries stimulating readers to visit the campaign website for news and daily updates (Rackaway 2009, 80).

Unfortunately, Gnarr’s blog is not accessible any longer. Thus, an examination of the blog is not possible. Based on the genre description some of the common functions of blogs nevertheless can be inferred: According to his autobiography, Gnarr first announced his creation of The Best Party on Facebook, then created a blog and posted “surrealist prose on social issues,” as he phrases it. One of his blog entries won attention, which led to the press asking for interviews (Gnarr 2014, 65). Thus, it appears that the blog initially served to create visibility and media exposure.

Moreover, since the blog was one of the first steps Gnarr took towards creating a political party, it was also one of the first places he started expressing himself politically—

or at least expressing himself as the founder of a political party. Miller and Shepherd point out that 'the self' in a blog "is a construction, possibly an experimental one," and "that construction is an ongoing event, the self being disclosed a continual achievement" (Miller & Shepherd 2004, np.). Thus, the blog may have functioned as a 'playground' or 'testing site' for Gnarr: It was possibly where he started to develop and experiment with his unstable political self that he also appeared as in the mainstream media throughout the campaign. Moreover, the digital platform allowed him to vent his thoughts about the current state of affairs, thereby serving the typified social action of self-expression. Additionally, based on this self-expression, the blog initially also may have helped develop a community of supporters.

The campaign website as genre and www.bestiflokkurinn.is

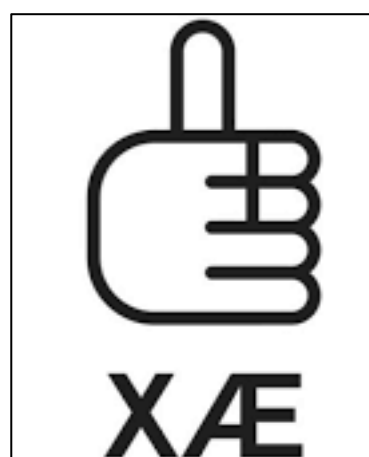
Since the early 2000s campaign websites increasingly have become commonplace in election campaigns (see, e.g., Foot & Schneider 2006; Druckman, Kifer & Parkin 2009, 22; Tolstrup 2013, 195; Trent et al. 2016, 289). Based on Foot and Schneider's study of "Web Campaigning Practices on U.S. Campaign Web sites, 1998-2004," the most prevalent features on campaign websites include candidate biography, issue positions, campaign news, donation information, contact information (additional to Email), photos from events, and a campaign calendar (Foot and Schneider 2006, 158). Other common formal features include multimedia features, such as audio and video clips; personalization features, which allow users to give personal information and thereby customize the information they receive when interacting with the website; and external links, e.g., to voter registration websites and news articles (Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin 2009, 23–25).

Campaign websites thus serve to reach and inform voters (of policies, news, and events), recruit volunteers, and collect donations, among other things. But the function of a campaign website changes as the campaign evolves: Early on, the website principally serves to establish communication with the media and activists. Thus, like the blog, one typified social action of a campaign website is community development. As the campaign develops, the aim of the website is to attract undecided voters in order to provide them information about policies and candidates—all in an effort to win their support (Trent et al. 2016, 292).

According to his autobiography, Gnarr inaugurated The Best Party website in January 2010 by posting the political program, and, later the same month, The Best Party's "moral code."⁴⁶ I will analyze both of these texts shortly. The website (www.bestiflokkurinn.is) no longer exists, but an article in the national newspaper *Morgunblaðið* includes a screenshot of the website (see below) (*mbl.is* 2010).



Some of the elements on the website particularly stand out: In the top left corner, The Best Party's slogan and logo are placed. The slogan, "Besti Flokkurinn – er besti flokkurinn" ("The Best Party—is the best party"), carries a simple message illustrating a somewhat childlike logic. It aligns well with the "Thumbs up" logo (see also right figure). The internationally recognized symbol for approval signals the party's positive attitude, which was an incongruous attitude at the time. The logo itself also



exhibits disharmony: As Gnarr reveals in his autobiography, the thumb deliberately was

⁴⁶ Furthermore, Gnarr posted the Best Party's manifesto on the website in January. All three texts are included in the autobiography.

made longer in an attempt to give it a slightly indecent look (Gnarr 2014, 69). Thus, it was intended as a provocative element meant to engage recipients by deliberately violating aesthetic norms (Klujeff 2012).

The same applies to the photo of the woman showing cleavage in the top right corner of the screenshot: As in much advertising, the sexual dimension of the photo is meant to catch the eye. It, however, contrasts with The Best Party's slogan next to her, "algjört jafnértti!" ("Absolute equality!"). The stereotypical female representation thus contradicts the message that she appears to be endorsing and constitutes a clue to irony (Booth 1974). This element is incongruous on a campaign website, marking instead repetition with critical distance (Hutcheon 1985). The generic violation indicates, in other terms, that the website is a parodic uptake of a conventional campaign website, which primarily is signaled through incongruity (Hutcheon 1994, 156-157).

At the same time, the website also appears to include some of the generic features one would expect to find. For instance, the tabs from left to right read: Front page, content, people, politics, chat room, party, contact, and sitemap. The website apparently contains information about the candidates, their issue positions, the party, and how to contact them. The chat room furthermore appears to reflect the option of interacting with The Best Party—and the party's willingness to do so. Furthermore, the website includes donation information in the right side of screen shot.

Gnarr himself explains that they intended to make "the ugliest website that a party had ever put on the Internet," and that it therefore consisted of the worst combination of colors, fonts, and typography that they could find (Gnarr 2014, 68). Thus, it was meant to give the worst possible impression of the party, making it appear as if the sender lacked professionalism (*phronesis*). The parody is self-destructive, in Hutcheon's terms, as it "both deviates from an aesthetic norm and includes that norm within itself as backgrounded material" (Hutcheon 1985, 44). It may be seen as a self-ironic rhetorical move in which The Best Party deliberately undermines its own ethos and thereby maintains a critical distance to the object of the parody, namely political self-representation on party websites. Hence, the website did not aim to accomplish the social action of the genre, namely to attract voters in order to convince them to support the party. Moreover, it reflects a candidate whose run for office is not serious.

The party's Facebook page, which I analyze later, includes many links to new texts posted on the campaign website during the campaign. As mentioned, some of these texts are reproduced in Gnarr's autobiography. The purpose of the following two analyses of The Best Party's party program and moral code is to examine how Gnarr and The Best Party take up the genres and the social actions they perform. For instance, in his autobiography, Gnarr characterizes the textual content of the website as pieces of text copied from other parties' websites and election material, thereby resulting in "a unique cocktail, completely meaningless but totally positive" (Gnarr 2014, 69). The analyses therefore investigate the rhetorical motive behind this collage-technique. Furthermore, the generic approach to the material allows me to examine what the choice of a 'foreign' genre—the moral code—reveals about The Best Party's motives.

The analyses are carried out similarly: They begin with an examination of the form and substance of the genre and proceed to describe and analyze how the two texts take up the genre and the social actions they serve.

The party program as genre and The Best Party's party program⁴⁷

In general, party programs, along with manifestoes and platforms, express a political party's ideas and ideologies (Vassallo and Wilcox 2006, 415). In essence, they describe what the party plans to achieve, and how it plans to achieve it. The content of party programs typically is characterized as a party's values and visions for developments in society and "contain some mix of ideological statements, abstract principles, broad goals, and specific policy proposals" (ibid). The official document also takes different forms as either a policy agenda, outlining the party's long-term plan in general terms; a 'work program,' stating in more specific and precise terms the party's position on short-term societal issues; or an election program, declaring the party's plans if elected (Bille n.d.) and its election pledges (Mansergh and Thomson 2007, 311).

Moreover, a party program is "a type of *constitutive rhetoric*" (Roer 2014, 378, original emphasis, my translation from Danish)—a term that originally derives from Kenneth Burke and *A Grammar of Motives* (1945). "As a genre," Maurice Charland writes, "constitutive rhetoric simultaneously presumes and asserts a fundamental collective

⁴⁷ See Appendix C.

identity for its audience, offers a narrative that demonstrates that identity, and issues a call to act to affirm that identity” (Charland 2001, 616). A party program therefore can be understood as a founding text, that is, an articulation of a party’s founding principles, and a warrant for the actions it means to carry out. The generic exigence of the party program thus can be characterized as a recurrent need for determining the party’s guideline and informing the electorate about what the party stands for and what people can expect from the party in exchange for their vote.

The Best Party’s party program is about one and a half page long and describes its profile, values, plans, and pledges for the future. Overall, the text moves from a description of the challenges in Iceland to a description of The Best Party and the initiatives it plans to carry out if elected. More specifically, it outlines the need to introduce a welfare model as seen in Scandinavian countries to secure social justice as a consequence of the economic crisis. It categorizes the party as “a transparent, democratic reform party” that is engaged in environmental protection, among other things. It also mentions the parties’ values (e.g., equality) and election promises. Thus, the text meets some of the situational requirements of the genre, as it includes the type of information recipients of a party program expect to find.

However, the party program also deviates substantively and stylistically from the genre throughout the text. In fact, even the title of the political program hints at its modification of the genre: “Our goals: a new *kind* of political program” (my emphasis). It begins by declaring that it “combines the highlights of all the other parties’ programs” (Gnarr 2014, 57). Taken literally, the sentence could be hinting at the ‘surrealistic collage-technique’ Gnarr confesses to in his autobiography. The following sentences also seem to be a mix of textual fragments:

We rely primarily on concepts that have proven themselves in the welfare states of Northern Europe. That sounds pretty good when you first hear it. Both the state-controlled planned economy with its paternalism, and the laissez-faire and market ethos of neoliberalism have failed, while societies that embody an active democracy seem to be quite resilient. (Ibid)

Here, a stylistic shift occurs in the second sentence, marking a 'low' style by creating a bathos effect. The transition from the inserted comment to the next sentence is particularly striking, since what follows is a string of complicated words describing political conditions written in an objective tone. Accordingly, the change of style reveals a compositional incongruity, corresponding to Booth's clue to irony, "Clashes of style:" Stylistic irony reveals itself as inconsistencies in the writing style, for example, as shifts in the vocabulary or language, or an unusual punctuation. Thus, a text may arouse suspicion if part of it suddenly deviates from what we consider the usual or ordinary way of writing, or the particular author's way of writing (Booth 1974, 63). In other words, this stylistic shift marks a breach of the generic form.

More stylistic breaches follow, as Gnarr proceeds to describe the tasks lying ahead of The Best Party:

The economic crisis has hit us particularly hard and meant the crash was deeper for us than it was for most of our neighbors. Unfortunately, the mood in the country is correspondingly lousy. That's why the Best Party now really has to roll up its sleeves and be a model of reconstruction, economic stability, social justice, and a better standard of living, a torchbearer to free us from the dark ages and lead us into a better future. We want to maintain freedom of trade and an open, non-state controlled economic order.

To be honest: We don't have any party program of our own. But we still act as if we did. (Gnarr 2014, 57-58)

Starting from the top of the quotation, a shift of style appears between the second and third sentence: The informal, and thus unconventional, description of the mood in the country as "lousy" contrasts with the pathos-filled declarations in the following sentence. The vernacular language is replaced with a solemn, even self-important figurative language seen in expressions such as: "roll up its sleeves," "a model of reconstruction," and "a torchbearer to free us from the dark ages." These metaphors emphasize that it is time for change and time to get to work—perhaps most emphatically expressed through the description of the Best Party as a "torchbearer," i.e., the light shining in "the dark ages" (the crisis).

However, the pathos in these lines is abruptly punctured in the following paragraph, when Gnarr admits to only having acted *as if* they have a party program, creating a bathos effect. The admission is a “direct statement,” in Rose’s terms, that is, a comment to the recipient of the parody (Rose 1993, 38). In this case, Gnarr ‘tells’ us that he was only imitating a political ‘high’ style. Further, this admission constitutes yet another clue to irony, namely a “Straightforward warning in the author’s own voice” (Booth 1974, 53). According to Booth, these “direct, unmistakable invitations” are often found in titles or epigraphs, such as quotations from famous ironists, or other kinds of direct statements from the author in the text. However, direct clues “may or may not be reliable clues as to what the work achieves,” Booth writes, and we should therefore remain skeptical to the author’s intention, since “for all we can know in advance, [s/he] may turn things upside down once more” (ibid, 55).

Accordingly, it raises questions such as: Is the entire political program meant as a joke, or only parts of it? For example, the suggestion that Iceland adopts the Scandinavian welfare model to “secure social justice and restore its future” seems reasonable in light of the crisis. But how is the reader supposed to tell the difference between serious suggestions and mocking parody?

The admission constitutes an obvious generic violation: Recipients expect to read a party program but are now informed that The Best Party does not actually have one. Thus, the text admits to being a parodic uptake of a party program and aims to accomplish an entirely different social action than informing recipients about The Best Party’s plans for the future if elected. Furthermore, it causes a shift in expectations because if this is not a party program, what is it then?

The second half of the text continues to outline what the Best Party is and what it wants. The text continues to do so, while mixing formal and colloquial language, thus exhibiting more stylistic shifts signaling parody, as seen in the following text excerpt:

We defend the systematic statehood and economic and cultural independence of Iceland, including its parliamentary democracy and its legal system. Citizens are being extremely cautious these days. That is understandable. For us, individual human beings are paramount, and by that we mean women as well as men. We don’t think that women are naïve fools who only come out with trivial crap, but serious people who have something to

say [...] Therefore, we want to open a women's café, where women can indulge in every imaginable specialty coffee, in flavors such as vanilla or cinnamon, while chatting away to their heart's content and slagging off whoever and whatever they want—and every word will be recorded and carefully archived. (Ibid)

The first sentence echoes abstract political language. What does it mean to “defend the systematic statehood and economic and cultural independence of Iceland”—and against whom? It may or may not be seriously meant and appears to mimic political platitudes, which any political party could have written. The same applies to the fourth sentence: “For us, individual human beings are paramount.” The emptiness of this imitated language marks the critical edge of the parody; it exposes and attacks political language as essentially form void of content.

Furthermore, this imitated high style shifts to a low style, when Gnarr switches to a vernacular vocabulary reflected in words and terms such as “naïve fools,” “trivial crap,” and “slagging off...” Moreover, this passage shows not only a change of vocabulary, but also a change in Gnarr's writing style: One thought seems to take over the next, and there is no clear connection between the first and second sentence, for example. However, the following digression into the women's café appears too coordinated to be just a surrealistic stream of consciousness. Rather, the passage appears to mimic surrealistic automatic writing—a calculated absurdity. Moreover, the extreme level of detail in the women's café initiative reflects Hutcheon's second structural marker, “exaggeration/understatement” (Hutcheon 1994, 156-157). Although Gnarr's presentation of women in this passage appears sexist, no other information or material supports such an interpretation. Rather, the unusual and inconsistent writing style signals that it is a parodic uptake of a cliché-ridden proposal for gender equality.

The final paragraphs of the program present a series of pledges, first linking to the party's focus on environmental protection, second to the party's general attitude and behavior:

we want systematic recycling, a transparent use of natural resources, electric cars, and less pollution of the air and the environment, all on the basis of equality and equal authority—in line with the values of our party. We do not smoke and we do not drink alcohol. We will turn

up at meetings and gatherings and, whenever possible, be in a good mood—we will also be thoughtful, take responsibility, and make decisions.

We want a new society—the best society that ever existed! (Gnarr 2014, 59)

The sudden shift of topic in the middle of the paragraph again marks an inconsistent writing style alerting us to irony. But contrary to all other pledges or initiatives presented in the political program, the pledges concerning environmental protection appear serious. These are plausible pledges, neither irrational like the women's café nor too commonplace like the ones that follow concerning the party's "good mood" and ability to "make decisions." These latter pledges are examples of the ironic marker "literalization/simplification" (Hutcheon 1994, 156-158). Promising in such literal terms that one will "make decisions" and "take responsibility," for example, is not actually promising anything at all.

Above all, the parodic uptake violates the genre by not informing recipients about what the party intends to do if elected. In other words, recipients are left guessing about The Best Party after reading this text. Thus, it is marked by unstable irony: The intention of Gnarr, the ironist, is unclear in the sense that apart from mocking the genre, the text does not provide clarity about whether or not The Best Party is, in fact, a serious contender in the election.

Gnarr's self-representation in the text moreover rests on unstable irony: On the one hand, it represents his parodic persona as a political candidate full of positive intentions, promising only the best of the best. Furthermore, he admits to 'borrowing' from other political parties' programs, because it "sounds pretty good." Thus, it matches his overall campaign performance as a "simple-minded local politician" or "a simpleton" with a positive attitude. On the other hand, the text leaves an impression of a calculating, strategic satirist: By admitting to imitating political programs of other parties and adding surrealistic suggestions between the serious-sounding sections, the text marks a critical distance to the genre and to the kind of formal language common in political programs. Overall, it reveals that The Best Party's party program aims to accomplish the social action of political humor (criticism and entertainment) rather than the social action of the election campaign genre (winning votes).

The moral code as genre and The Best Party's moral code⁴⁸

As mentioned, a moral code is not a common campaign genre. The label itself suggests a protocol, etiquette, or a set of principles outlining morally responsible behavior. A moral code therefore could be acquainted with an organization's corporate social responsibility (CSR) statement or policy, which concerns its values and compliance with ethical standards, laws, and norms. It may even outline "actions that appear to further some social good, beyond the interests of the firm and that which is required by law" (McWilliams and Siegel 2001, 117). A company's CSR policy is also meant as a guide for its clients to what the company stands for. Its social action is thus to inform the public of how the company takes responsibility for its impact on society.

Corporate Social Responsibility moreover relates to business ethics. Ethics, in general, as DeGeorge writes, concerns "the rules that ought to govern human conduct [and] the values worth pursuing" (DeGeorge 2010, 13). In the context of a business website, a moral code also could be understood as an articulation of an organization's values and its "mission, vision, goals, and reward or punishment system," thereby reflecting its organizational culture (Bowen 2017, 317). Thus, as a genre, a moral code is more commonly or easily associated with a business website and its presence on a political party website therefore violates our expectations. Accordingly, the choice of genre raises the questions: Why does Gnarr take up this genre? And what social action does it aim to accomplish?

The text consists of a brief introduction composed of three short paragraphs followed by 10 points detailing the Best Party's "rules of moral behavior," as Gnarr puts it (Gnarr 2014, 94). Each rule begins with an emphasized keyword followed by an explanation. These keywords are: 1) "Independence," 2) "Honesty," 3) "Personal Hygiene," 4) "Helpfulness," 5) "Cover-ups," 6) "Confidentiality," 7) "Good mood," 8) "Respect," 9) "Honesty," and 10) "Cooperation" (Gnarr 2014, 94-96). As is seen, the keyword "Honesty" appears twice, but the text ensuing the identical keywords is different. I will return to this apparent mistake later.

⁴⁸ See Appendix D.

Overall, the initial text is characterized by logos and to some degree pathos. In the first two paragraphs, the text establishes that the rules of moral behavior apply to The Best Party members and representatives, and that the penalties of violating these rules are serious. These paragraphs are characterized by formal and legal language reflected in phrases such as “Anyone who is suspected of violating the rules must temporarily relinquish office while relevant officials investigate the matter” (Gnarr 2014, 93).

Fragments in between the legal phrasings arouse suspicion of irony. For example, the second sentence in the first paragraph informs us that the rules hold for “individuals who represent the party in public, in the media, on the Internet, or using other, similar technologies, *including those that have yet to be invented*” (ibid, my emphasis). This list of possible communication platforms, existing as well as non-existing, appears overly detailed, even exaggerated. A similar example supports this impression: In the second paragraph we learn that if a Best Party member is suspended, this member “must surrender his or her party card *as well as all articles that bear the logo of the Best Party, such as T-shirts, buttons, and pens*” (ibid, my emphasis). Again, this detailed list of objects that one must return upon suspension of the party seems exaggerated: Demanding to have a button or pen returned hardly seems like normal practice. These over-detailed, exaggerated statements function as hyperbolic signals marking irony (Hutcheon 1994, 156-157).

The initial incongruous elements indicate that the text is a parodic uptake of a CSR related genre: It outlines the rules and laws that the party complies with and the moral values it represents through an inconsistent ‘high’ style. For example, in the 10 rules that follow the style shifts from a formal language to a vernacular language, in particular towards the end. Vernacular words and phrases, such as “old granny” in rule 4), “If someone tells us that we suck,” and “We do not discriminate against anyone, not even the dumbest moron,” both in rule 8), clash with the logos style, which was prevalent in the beginning of the text. Inconsistencies of vocabulary or language, shifts in sociolects or dialects, and variations of spelling are all examples of stylistic markers of irony (Booth 1974, 71; Hutcheon 1994, 156).

Logos, however, still characterizes rule 1): This rule centers on “Independence” and firmly states that the Best Party is “autonomous and independent,” and therefore does not accept contributions from any source (Gnarr 2014, 94). If an offer of financial support is

made, the Best Party must reply: "*The acceptance of sponsorship from commercial companies violates Article 1 in our moral code!*" (ibid, original emphasis). The language echoes that of a legal document, thus reflecting logos, and the use of italics and exclamation point signals a strong conviction, thus reflecting pathos. But the solemn style is discontinued in the following and last sentence of the rule as pathos turns into bathos: "However, it is not excluded that we may declare this point to be void where necessary, or at least rethink it and change its wording" (ibid).

The strong conviction expressed in the former sentence is incongruous with the sudden change of attitude in the following sentence. It also marks an obvious generic violation to make rules that include exceptions to the very same rules. It dismisses the entire purpose of the genre. Thus, the social action is not to present The Best Party's protocol of its ethical standards and norms to the public. Rather, the ironic inversion of this rule (and others) indicates that the text means to mock the act of formulating rules that are so easily broken.

As mentioned, rule 2) and 9) are both called "Honesty" and thereby reflect Booth's second clue to irony, "Known error proclaimed" (Booth 1974, 57-59). This clue refers to the type of 'mistakes' in the text, which seem too extraordinary or ignorant to be unintentional. The author includes a known error, in other words, to signal the use of irony. In this case the critic has to decide, whether it is most probable that Gnarr deliberately used the same keyword twice, or whether he simply failed to notice the repetition.

Judging also from the content of these rules it is most likely that Gnarr meant to repeat the keyword, which thus functions as a clue to irony: Both rules reject that The Best Party members or representatives would ever tell a lie, but then at the same time admit that it could happen. Accordingly, rule 2) solemnly declares: "*We expressly decline to tell a lie*. Should this nevertheless occur, we will admit it without hesitation. If we are caught telling a lie, we ask for forgiveness and promise never to do it again" (Gnarr 2014, 94-95, my emphasis). In comparison, rule 9) firmly states: "*We never lie*—unless we are forced to do so" (ibid, 96, my emphasis). Thus, like the first rule, both rules 2) and 9) exhibit incongruous statements marking irony: The absolute rejection, "We never lie," is invalidated by the following part, "unless we are forced to do so." The exception cancels the entire rule.

Several other rules follow this pattern. For example, rule 5) concerning “Cover-ups” initially declares that the Best Party will not keep silent or take part of cover-ups, as this threatens democracy. “[W]e make no use of these practices, at most exceptionally and then only in self-defense. With us, everything gets said—except when it damages the reputation of the party” (ibid, 95). The Best Party is, in other words, at liberty to accept financial support, lie, or cover something up, if it is in the party’s best interest to do so.

The wording of the rules clearly express that the social action of the text is not to enforce these rules, but to expose how easily they are broken. The parodic uptake has a highly satiric edge: It functions to criticize immoral behavior, and since Gnarr mixes genres belonging to the worlds of politics and business, this criticism is directed at both, that is, the politicians and bankers responsible for the financial crisis. He does so by ironically inverting the rules of moral conduct rendering these obsolete and, in effect, absurd. As such, he acts as the satirist holding the political and financial elite to a moral standard, speaking truth to power, thereby fulfilling the social function of political humor.

Moreover, the text reflects Gnarr’s unstable shifting political persona. It primarily represents Gnarr as a calculating candidate (more so than simple-minded), who admits that The Best Party will, for example, cover up and tell lies, if it suits the party. This persona knows the political jargon and echoes political platitudes in a self-important and solemn or high style to give weight to the lofty expressions. He furthermore introduces a business genre to the political party website, thereby signaling his adherence to the business world as well. Thus, through his persona, Gnarr signals a satiric intention with the parody, namely to expose and criticize the hypocrisy among the political and financial elite.

But like the party program, this text too leaves its recipients in the dark with respect to The Best Party’s intentions. Is The Best Party to be understood as a serious alternative to the current politicians? Contrary to the genre, this text is unclear rather than informative, and thereby sabotages the generic function. In turn, it may have provided the public comic relief, if the public recognizes the target (political and financial authorities) and agrees with the parody.

Facebook as social media platform and The Best Party's Facebook page

Facebook came into existence in 2004 and is, as Catherine Shaw puts it, “still king of social networking” (Shaw 2018, 93). The social networking platform enables users to create personal profile pages and group pages (such as for a campaign) and share content for free. The most central formal feature probably is the status update. Users can post status updates consisting of text, video, photos, and links, which other users can comment on or ‘like.’ Status updates can be characterized as ‘micro blogging’ and thus may serve the same functions of self-expression and community development as blogs (Miller and Shepherd 2004, 2009). Furthermore, frequency and brevity of status updates are formal features often emphasized in campaign literature (Shaw 2018, 96; Tolstrup 2013, 206). Shaw, for example, recommends updating the Facebook page every other day during the campaign for achieving the most likes.

Facebook can perform a number of functions relative to an election campaign. A Facebook campaign page can be used for advertising (by placing ads in the newsfeed or sidebar) (Trent et al. 2016, 295), informing users about the campaign (e.g., by linking to other social media platforms or websites)(ibid), and activating and interacting directly with voters (Shaw 2018, 94). In fact, researchers and campaign managers generally agree that the platform’s primary social action relates to *personal dialogue* (see e.g., Tolstrup 2013, 204-205; Shaw 2018, 84). Guides for using Facebook for online campaigning therefore commonly center on inviting and maintaining dialogue with users. For instance, by making short updates rather than long and keeping it “catchy” (Shaw 2018, 85), or by posing a question and following up on user’s input and comments (Tolstrup 2013, 204-205).

The official Facebook page for The Best Party, which still exists, is called “Besti Flokkurinn.”⁴⁹ The first status update on “Besti Flokkurinn” was posted on 31st of January 2010 along with four others. The first update was “[Besti Flokkurinn] er bestur!” ([The Best

⁴⁹ The Best Party’s Facebook page (in Icelandic):

<https://www.facebook.com/bestiflokkurinn/>. Once he became mayor, Gnarr also created the Facebook page “Diary of a Mayor,” which still exists as well (in English):

<https://www.facebook.com/diary.of.a.mayor/>. Gnarr also has a public Facebook page (in English): <https://www.facebook.com/I%C3%B3n-Gnarr-244993732224805/>. (All seen on 8th of June 2018).

Party] is the best!") It received two likes and four comments, one of which read "Nákvæmlega" ("exactly"). Overall, The Best Party starts out making few and infrequent updates on "Besti Flokkurinn" (for instance, there is a gap of silence between 12th of February and 26th of March) and intensify their efforts significantly in the weeks before the election on 29th of May. Between 31st of January and 30th of April they make 22 status updates, whereas in May up and including Election Day there are 104 updates by comparison.

In general, updates concerning The Best Party's climb in the polls receive the most 'likes.' For example, on 26th of March the party posts two links to different news articles concerning the newest election poll that shows 12,7 percent support of The Best Party. These posts receive 68 and 85 likes, respectively. The highest number of likes any posts on the Facebook page had received prior to this day was 13. Similarly, on 30th of April The Best Party posts a link to a new poll showing that The Best Party has increased its support, which is now at 24 percent. 109 people like this post, the highest number thus far. In May, the most likes, 291, is awarded the first post that includes the link to The Best Party's campaign video ("The Best Video," which I examine later) on 16th of May. The increase of likes suggests an increase of users following The Best Party on Facebook and likely supporting the party.

In an overall perspective, the content of the posts and updates on the Facebook page between its start on 31st of January and Election Day 29th of May can be described as follows: The Best Party generally posts most links to press coverage of the party and links to new articles they have published on the campaign website (bestiflokkurinn.is). The press coverage includes interviews with The Best Party's members, news from the campaign, and the most recent election polls. Thus, one of the main functions of The Best Party's Facebook page was to keep users updated about their campaign. Moreover, it is used to create a connection between platforms, which most likely generated more traffic on the campaign website. In fact, an update on 20th of May declares The Best Party's website more popular than the website for public transport in Reykjavík (strætó.is), the parliament's website (althingi.is), and the website of a supermarket in Iceland (bonus.is),

among others.⁵⁰

Other recurrent types of updates, though a little less frequent, include posts in which The Best Party thanks for people's support, mentions and links to "The Best Video" on YouTube, and uploads photos of Gnarr or campaign events. Moreover, The Best Party makes several updates with a similar positive, slightly naïve message. For example, on 22nd of May: "góðan dag Reykjavík!" ("Good day Reykjavík!"). Or, on 24th of May: "í dag er mánudagur en samt frídagur og sól, það er gaman" ("Today is Monday, but it is still a holiday and sunny, it's fun"). The tone of these messages aligns well with the party's overall positive attitude (its logo and pledges) as well as the purpose behind the party: having fun and spreading joy. Thus, it appears authentic—a characteristic Shaw also recommends since, "[s]ocial media users respond to communication that is authentic, compelling, lively, funny, and smart" (Shaw 2018, 85).

Particularly in May the party make several posts encouraging people to vote on 29th of May—and to vote for The Best Party. For instance, an update on 19th of May reads: "mundu að setja x við Æ, 29.maí!!!" ("remember to put x on Æ, May 29th!!!"). Moreover, in May, there are several posts in which the party invites people to come by their new election office and play table tennis, for instance, or have a drink. They used Facebook, in other words, to encourage people to take action (vote) and take part of the election in person at their office, thereby encouraging personal dialogue as well. The Best Party moreover invites people to join their election events and election party (by live-posting many photos from these events) close to and on Election Day.

Thus, it appears The Best Party used its Facebook page for the purposes of the election campaign genre: to inform and interact with voters, encourage personal dialogue—primarily in real life—thereby maximizing their chance of support and votes. Although there are relatively few instances of The Best Party either posing a question in an update, thereby inviting users to engage, or responding to a question or comment left in a user comment, they clearly used Facebook actively in the campaign. Moreover, the comments posted on the Facebook page are almost exclusively positive, it seems, which

⁵⁰ The Facebook post reads: "[Besti Flokkurinn] er glaður, því heimasíða hans er ein af vinsælustu heimsíðum landsins. Vinsælli en strætó.is, althingi.is, tonlist.is, 69.is og bonus.is. Þakka ykkur fyrir heimsóknirnar!" ("[The Best Party] is happy, because its website is one of the country's most popular sites. More popular than bus.is, althingi.is, tonlist.is, 69.is and bonus.is. Thank you for your visits!")

gives an indication of the party's supporters.

YouTube as social media platform and The Best Party's YouTube videos

YouTube is a social media platform that has existed since 2005 as a site for video sharing (Gueorguieva 2009, 235). Essentially, the content of YouTube is videos that users can upload and watch for free, as well as subscribe to, comment on, and rate. These videos may be categorized as instructional or educational, as video blogs, or as music videos and TV clips.

The first use of the social networking site for election campaigns is traced back to the 2006 election cycle in the U.S. (ibid, 233). By 2010, YouTube was probably still not an entirely commonplace tool in election campaigns, although it was not unusual. As a political advertising tool in a campaign, YouTube commonly is used for uploading video clips of public speeches, announcements, and ads (e.g., response or attack ads) (Trent et al. 2016, 296). The social media platform thus serves several social functions in a campaign: It may generate publicity and public debate (Trent et al. 2016, 296), raise funds and mobilize volunteers (Gueorguieva 2009, 233), and keep users informed of the candidate's campaign and message (Shaw 2018, 97).

On YouTube, Gnarr uploaded a number of monologues during the campaign, in which he addressed various topics more or less relevant to his campaign. For example, the beginning of the documentary "Gnarr" shows four clips from different YouTube videos (Úlfarsson 2010). In the first monologue, Gnarr announces his candidacy for city council and explains that he believes he has "an excellent background to become mayor. For a number of years I worked in a psych ward. And I almost completed my maritime certificate, which would have allowed me to captain a small vessel. I almost passed, so I have the experience..." In the second monologue, he randomly suggests importing squirrels from London. The third clip features Gnarr in a t-shirt upon which is written "Anarchy," and while holding a canister of germicide, he contemplates using it "for the enormous cleaning that awaits me." In the fourth monologue, he describes meeting citizens on his rounds in the city.

Gnarr's monologues take place in different rooms, against different backgrounds, and most often he is dressed casually in a t-shirt. Sometimes he sits far away from the computer, sometimes too close. He speaks hesitantly, like he does not really know what to

say, looking slightly uncomfortable and smiling a lot, almost nervously. Gnarr himself refers to this look as his “confused election twaddle” (Gnarr 2014, 67). By consequence, the videos appear unprofessional and unprepared, reflecting a political candidate who appears disoriented, rather than confident, about what he is doing and why he is doing it. Thus, as “political advertising tools” these videos do not appear to accomplish their generic function (Gueorguieva 2009, 237). Rather than bolster his ethos as a political candidate, they may impact his candidacy negatively. For instance, in her guide for the campaign manager, Shaw emphasizes: “Don’t put up unedited content or things with poor video or audio quality. No one will watch it and it will reflect poorly on your campaign” (Shaw 2018, 98).

According to his autobiography, Gnarr was initially inspired to do these monologues in order to imitate a politician who had uploaded “a yawn-inducing, tedious monologue” on YouTube (Gnarr 2014, 67). Even though we cannot know exactly how this monologue played out, it seems that Gnarr chose an entirely different strategy for his uptakes: Rather than appearing as if he is in control and has all the answers, he does the opposite and gives the impression that he is unfit for the job. Thus, his parody is characterized by the stylistic figure *excusatio propter infirmitatem*, better known as ‘I am not a speaker ...’ Through his performance as an uncomfortable looking political candidate, who makes random, surrealistic suggestions, he signals that he is not a ‘real’ politician. Gnarr’s parodic uptakes thus serve an entirely different social action: Through a differentiation strategy (Meyer 2000), Gnarr distances himself from established politicians. The video in which he uses the germicide as a metaphor for “cleaning up” the status quo politician, who has proven bad for the country, moreover functions as an attack.

Additionally, The Best Party published an election video in which Gnarr and about 10 party members sing an alternative version of Tina Turner’s hit song “The Best” in Icelandic relating to their campaign. The launch of “The Best video” is announced on The Best Party’s Facebook page “Besti Flokkurinn” on 14th of May in an update, which also includes a link for the video on YouTube.⁵¹ Just two days later, on 16th of May, the link for the video is

⁵¹ The Facebook post reads: “heimsfrumsýnir kosningartónlistarmyndband í kvöld í Íslandi í dag!! Ekki missa af þessu... þetta verður gæsaþúðatryllingur.....” (“World premier of the election campaign music video tonight on [the TV show] ‘Iceland today’!! Don’t miss this... you will get goose bumps.....”).

posted on Facebook again, and already at this point it has had 23.392 views on YouTube, as The Best Party's update reads.⁵² Anthropologist Hulda Proppé moreover declares the video a great success at the time (Proppé 2015, 86), and at present, it has been viewed more than 600,000 times on YouTube.⁵³

The Best Party's election video: "The Best Video"⁵⁴

The video is approximately four and a half minutes long and plays out as follows:

Video

Gnarr moves into the camera frame,
standing on a green hilltop.

Cut to Gnarr in sound studio.

Cut to Gnarr on hilltop, looking out on the
landscape, gesticulating.

Cut to song studio.

Cut to Gnarr on hilltop, looking out on the
landscape.

Cut to song studio.

Cut to Gnarr on hilltop, patting a rock.

Cut to sound studio.

Audio

Cut to sound studio.

Instrumental beginning of Tina Turner's
song "The Best."

Gnarr sings: "We want a city that is cuddly,
clean, and cool / And topnotch stuff as a
general rule."

Female party member sings: "Stop the usual
bluffs / Doing better isn't all that tough."

Male party member sings: "Fountains, wild
animals, and electric trains."

Male and female members alternately
whisper: "Best... Best...Best..."

Male party member sings: "No more
concrete and steel messing up our brains."

Two male party members sing with echo
effect: "Send it all back / Let the imbeciles

⁵² The Facebook post reads: "226 like komin á myndbandið og 23.392 áhorf á Youtube.....uuu like! Superlike!" ("226 likes the video and 23,392 views on Youtube uuu like! Super Like!").

⁵³ Seen on 8th of June 2018. The video can be found on YouTube here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xxBW4mPzv6E>

⁵⁴ See transcript of song lyrics in Appendix F. As the video is subtitled in English, I rely on this translation.

Video

Cut to Gnarr on playground, talking and listening to young boys.

Cut to Gnarr walking in nature.

Cut to footage of The Best Party parading in the streets of Reykjavík carrying pink balloons; Gnarr kisses a baby in a stroller;

Gnarr poses with a polar bear; Gnarr gives a speech, and people applaud.

Cut to Gnarr apparently making a joke and his campaign manager, Heiða Helgadóttir laughing.

Cut to song studio.

Cut to photo shoot of party members.

Cut to footage of Gnarr enthusiastically giving a speech.

Cut to Gnarr resting his head in his hand, looking over the landscape and city.

Cut to song studio.

Cut to Gnarr walking his little dog by the lake

Cut to Gnarr walking in Reykjavík.

Audio

pack.”

All party members sing chorus: “We are the best / The bestest of parties / Best for Reykjavík / Best city of every week /”

“Things have gone sour /

We’ve come to the clean-out hour /

The message is plain /”

“We’ve come to the clean-out hour /”

Male member sings in coarse voice: “Gimme a B / gimme an E / gimme a S / gimme a T.”

Male and female members alternately whisper: “Best... Best...Best...”

Female member sings: “Tell the squatters in charge that it is time to leave.”

Male and female member sing in duet: “The blathering loons should be given a home in the city zoo.”

All party members sing: “We are the Best / The bestest of parties /”

“Best for Reykjavík /”

“Best city of every week / Things have gone sour / We’ve come to the clean-out hour / It’s time for a major change.”

Video

Cut to Gnarr outside, on top of a building, yelling out a speech to the landscape, heavily gesticulating.

Cut to Gnarr, standing with his little dog by the lake; camera zooms in on the dog in the last shot.

Audio

Gnarr and female member sing in duet: “All by yourself on Election Day / The ballot looking lifeless and a little gray / You have to choose, it’s all such a mess / Vote for us, we’re the Best.”

Gnarr’s speech: “Fellow citizens, The time has come for everyone in Reykjavík to look inside their hearts To discuss with their family and friends: Do I want a bright future with the Best Party? Or do I want Reykjavík destroyed?” [Party members sing chorus in the background]

Gnarr lists election promises: “Free towels in all swimming pools; a polar bear for the Reykjavík zoo; all kinds of things for the unfortunate; Disneyland in the Vatsnamyrí area; a drug-free parliament by 2020; Sustainable transparency; away with Bj**i Ben and in with Einar Ben; tollbooths on the border with Seltjarnarnes [a municipality next to Reykjavík]; do away with all the debt; free access to Hljómskálagardurinn [a city center park]; economize: we only need one Santa. And...and we will not accept the mediocre, because we want the Best!”

Music fades out.

The video is best characterized as a parodic uptake of a political ad. Although the form and substance of political ads vary greatly, there are four “basic political advertising messages:” the *positive* message, devised to build the candidate’s ethos and help promote a positive image of the candidate in the eyes of the voters; the *negative* message devised to attack an opponent by emphasizing personal flaws and weaknesses, or instances of poor judgment or behavior; the *comparative* message devised to charge against an opponent on the basis of a political sticking point; and the *response* message devised to respond to attacks or accusations from opponents (Trent et al. 2016, 255. See also: Tuman 2008, 234; Shaw 2018, 239). Additionally, political ads can serve such functions as activating citizens, reinforcing support, affecting undecided voters, establishing the candidate’s character, providing entertainment (Trent et al. 2016, 117), generating media coverage, and harming the opponent’s credibility (Tuman 2008, 251). Principally, though, the generic exigence of the political ad during an election campaign appears to be a recurrent need for recommending a candidate, criticizing the opponent, and responding to attacks (Trent et al. 2016, 119).

“The Best Video” chiefly communicates a positive message, as it centers on Gnarr and The Best Party. It is designed to promote the party as “better than all the rest,” as they sing. Through footage of primarily Gnarr engaging with citizens or smiling on his own, the video communicates the story of a candidate with a positive attitude who cares about his city and its people. At the same time, however, the video violates the generic purpose of the political ad both substantively and stylistically, thereby marking repetition with critical distance (Hutcheon 1985). These breaches of genre are partly linked to Gnarr’s self-representation in the video and partly to the song lyrics.

Starting with the footage of Gnarr walking around in Reykjavík in a suit, tie, and long coat, viewers initially see him standing alone, grinning to himself for no apparent reason and sometimes gesticulating, i.e., spreading his arms out as if to say: Look at all this! He furthermore crouches down and pats a big rock like one would pat a dog, also for no obvious reason. This behavior is unusual, and since it cannot be explained by the context, it becomes incongruous. Thus, the video alerts viewers to irony early on. Furthermore, this footage reflects D. C. Muecke’s description of “Self-disparaging Irony” in which “the ironist brings himself on stage, so to speak, in the character of an ignorant, credulous, earnest, or

over-enthusiastic person” (Muecke 1969, 62). Such a self-representation undermines his ethos as a political candidate and thus generically violates the purpose of an election video.

Gnarr’s self-representation in the sound studio, in turn, differs significantly from the clips of him dressed formally, as just described: In the studio, Gnarr is casually dressed and has uncombed hair and stubble. Thus, the two kinds of footage of Gnarr stylistically clash, and the incongruities between his self-representations primarily signal that the video is a parodic uptake of an election ad. Moreover, the visual contrast signals a change of character: In the sound studio, Gnarr does not resemble a political candidate, but rather an individual dressed in his everyday clothes, like the other Best Party members. It highlights the difference between his “fictional self,” that is, his parodic “over-enthusiastic” political persona walking the streets of Reykjavík, and his “real self” (Cherry 1988, 257). The song lyrics also reflect this change of character, as we shall see shortly.

The next clips of Gnarr feature him campaigning in Reykjavík with The Best Party. Here, Gnarr is seen walking through the city carrying pink balloons, kissing a baby in a stroller, and receiving applause after giving a speech. In this footage, Gnarr builds his ethos in a generic manner by presenting himself as a political candidate who is forthcoming, a talented speaker (*phronesis*), and popular among people (*eunoia*). This representation is consistent with typical campaign behavior. For instance, Trent et al. list a number of activities that political candidates are seen engaging in during an election campaign, which include participating “in parades and rallies,” wearing “funny hats,” kissing babies, and shaking hands at supermarkets and other venues (Trent et al. 2016, 8).

However, these clips of Gnarr suddenly appearing as a socially capable candidate contrast with the previous clips of him naïvely patting a rock. They also clash with his representation in the end of the video, as he delivers a speech: From the top of a building overlooking Reykjavík, Gnarr gestures greatly as he excitedly shouts out his speech and list of election promises, apparently to everyone and no one at the same time. Hence, his use of pathos in front of no audience is also incongruous in the situation. Again we see him playing with roles, that is, the behavior of a simpleton at one point mixed with the generic behavior of a political candidate. Adding to this, in the very last shot of the video the camera zooms in on Gnarr’s little dog and thus contrasts with the pathos of the dramatic speech he just gave, creating a bathos effect.

The song lyrics moreover match this naïve self-representation, as they reflect use of a vernacular language. For example, the opening lines of the song are: “We want a city that is *cuddly*, clean, and *cool*/ And *topnotch* stuff as a general rule” (my emphasis). The choice of words echoes a young and informal language, not that of a serious political candidate. Moreover, the word “Best” and variations of it is repeated so heavily and explicitly that it arouses suspicion of irony and therefore of the sender’s sincerity. For example, the chorus begins as follows: “We are the *best* / The *bestest* of parties / *Best* for Reykjavík / *Best* city of every week” (my emphasis). Furthermore, the third verse begins with spelling “Best”: “Gimme a B, gimme an E, gimme an S, gimme a T,” and is followed by whispers from the group: “best, best, best, best...” As Hutcheon outlines, repetition or echoic mention can be explicit, evoked, self-evoking, indirect, or direct, and is “one of the most common categories of markers” (Hutcheon 1994, 158). In this case, the exaggerated use of the word constitutes a generic violation, signaling The Best Party’s mimicry of political parties all claiming to be the best.

Adding to this, the chorus includes a deliberate grammatical mistake, “bestest,” that is, a stylistic clue to irony. It also could be seen as Booth’s second clue to irony, namely “known error proclaimed,” since it is too unlikely that the mistake is not intended. Claiming to be the best obviously contradicts making such a basic grammatical mistake, which results in bathos. Thus, although The Best Party promotes itself as the best, the song lyrics reflect a self-ironic distance to the party’s candidacy. While they attack traditional politicians, they at the same time do not build their own ethos as a political party or alternative to the status quo. In other words, they leave recipients guessing what their intentions actually are.

The song lyrics also contain a negative message, as they attack and criticize politicians. For example, these are referred to as “imbeciles,” “squatters in charge,” and “blathering loons.” Such examples of name-calling reflect Frye’s characterization of “satire in which there is relatively little irony” (Frye 1973, 223) and the work of a satirist acting as a “mocking or indignant observer” (Gowers 2012). The aggressive attacks serve a clear divisive function. At the same time, they clash with Gnarr’s positive attitude visually mirrored in his constant smiling and grinning. Thus, although the criticism is harsh and direct, it is softened by Gnarr’s surrealistic representation. This might have created comic

relief, as recipients are offered an opportunity to laugh 'away' their frustration with established politicians, thereby releasing some tension.

The negative message of the video designed to attack status quo politicians also is delivered more subtly in the ad. For example, the location of Gnarr's speech in the end of the video has not been chosen at random as it is of special significance to Reykjavík citizens, according to Proppé (2015, 86). Here, Gnarr stands on the balcony of a building and restaurant called Perlan. The building was severely criticized the year it was constructed, as many people considered it a monument of the then mayor (from 1982-1991), Davíð Oddsson, who initiated the construction. Oddsson was furthermore Prime Minister of Iceland from 1991 to 2004 and bank director of the Icelandic national bank during the economic collapse. Today, he is the editor of the newspaper *Morgunblaðið* and "is considered by many still the political 'father figure' of Iceland" (Boyer 2013, 286, note 7). Therefore, in Proppé's words, the building Perlan "represents the 'old Iceland' and the policies that led to the economic crash" (Proppé 2015, 86).

Hence, the building functions as a symbol of greed and profusion. Moreover, Gnarr's strategic choice of location for his speech visually underlines the opposition between The Best Party and traditional politics and politicians such as Oddsson. Gnarr also expresses this dichotomy verbally in the beginning of his speech, as he asks rhetorically: "Do I want a bright future with The Best Party? Or do I want Reykjavík destroyed?" Thus, although the video on the one hand primarily delivers a positive message about The Best Party, it on the other hand appears to center on a negative message about the ruling power.

Like previous analyses illustrated, this political ad, too, exhibits a constant tension: While Gnarr raises relevant issues with respect to current affairs and delivers serious criticisms at status quo politicians, he simultaneously sabotages these points and his candidacy through his surrealistic style and self-representation. Thus, the video does not serve the social action of a political ad. Instead, it serves the social action of political humor, as it attacks those in power for their incompetence (as implied in the name-calling, e.g., "blathering loons") and their arrogance (as visualized in the building Perlan). As mentioned, the video had many views soon after its release and was apparently a success. This suggests that people were entertained by and sympathized with the attack, which

likely resulted in votes. Thus, the violations of the genre may have worked in The Best Party's favor and impacted the election positively.

Adding to this, Gnarr's ironic persona is more stable in the video than in the website texts. The visual aspect—the incongruity between Gnarr's representation inside and outside the sound studio—coupled with the song lyrics particularly helps the meaning along. Thus, the use of irony is covert and audiences are not required to reconstruct the video's meaning more than once (Booth 1974). This aspect, in turn, also may have affected the popularity of the video.

The final weeks before Election Day and Gnarr's election term

According to the polls, The Best Party had 12,7 percent of the voters' support on 26th of March (Sigurðsson 2010). The support increased to 24 percent on 30th of April, approximately four weeks before Election Day (RÚV 2010). Around the same time, in April 2010, a report (*Rannsóknarskýrsla Alþingis*) containing an analysis of the events leading up to the economic collapse was published. It confirmed suspicions that corruption among Icelandic politicians had, at least partly, led to the financial crash. According to Sigurjónsdóttir, these revelations were a contributing factor to people's distrust of established politicians or, more generally, of Iceland's political and financial elite (2013, 102). For example, one news article suggests that the report impacted people's attitude towards their politicians, since The Independence Party lost six percentage points after the publication of the report (RÚV 2010). In turn, the timing of the report perhaps in part could explain The Best Party's electoral success.

About one week before Election Day The Best Party led the polls with 36 percent of the voters' support and had grown into the largest party in the city (Ólafsson 2010). Thus, at this point, out of 15 possible seats, The Best Party was predicted to win more seats in the council than two of the major political parties in Iceland combined: the Social Democratic Alliance and the Independence Party (Úlfarsson 2010). On Election Day The Best Party was declared winner of the election with the majority of votes, 34.7 percent, and winner of six council seats.

After the election, weeks of back-and-forth negotiations concerning the formation of the city council ensued. In the end, The Best Party managed to form a majority with the Social Democratic Alliance. Doubt and disbelief generally characterized the reactions

towards The Best Party's victory. Politicians, for instance, expressed skepticism: how would The Best Party manage in the council? (see e.g., Sveinsson 2010; Pálmadóttur 2010). The then Prime Minister Jóhanna Sigurdardóttir moreover described The Best Party's victory as a shock (Boyer 2013, 280). The Icelandic writer and debater, Andri Snær Magnason also expresses some ambivalence concerning the result: "Personally I have very mixed emotions about the election because you can easily see the party's program as pure nonsense. On the other hand, we before have experienced here on Iceland that humor has brought so much good along. The Best Party is an interesting experiment to bring into a political life that otherwise is in ruins" (Weiss 2010).

As mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, Reykjavík had had four different mayors between 2006 and 2010, and the city council was widely known for its cooperative problems. Adding to this, the city was severely indebted when Gnarr took over as mayor, which meant that he and the council had to reach consensus and take unpopular decisions involving large cutbacks, for example. Despite the difficult starting point, Gnarr stayed his full term as mayor. In fact, when Gnarr finished his term in May 2014, he was only the third mayor in 32 years, since 1982, to complete his four-year election period (Fontaine 2014). Adding to this, polls predicted 35 percent support for a second term near the end of his term in late 2013 (*RÚV* 2013).

5. Discussion: the role of humor in the comedians' campaigns

Having examined both of the comedians' election campaigns, this section proceeds to recapitulate, compare, and discuss central findings of the case studies with respect to the overall purpose of this dissertation. Namely, to approach a fuller understanding of how the comedians employed humor as a rhetorical strategy in their campaigns and how this use may have affected their victories. Furthermore, this chapter investigates the variety of genres the comedians take up and distort in their campaigns, and the social functions they perform through these genres.

The chapter is divided into two sections: The first section discusses the most extraordinary aspects of the comedians' victories. It moreover considers the extent to which the case studies, and the applied theory, help explain the comedians' victories in regard to how they used humor in their campaigns. The second section compares and discusses central aspects of the comedians' campaigns that likely impacted their victories. These aspects are primarily linked to the comedians' election promises and creation of parodic political personas.

The comedians' victories: how and why?

A key finding relative to the overall purpose of the dissertation is that although the comedians employed humor strategically, they did not use it for the generic purpose of an election campaign: to win the election. To begin with, their campaigns appeared to be motivated by a simple purpose: to have fun and raise laughter. Because they are comedians, one might add. For example, Haugaard states in his autobiography that he upon his victory "had a hard time explaining the world press⁵⁵ that the only point of my political work was fun and games" (1999, 44). His buffoonish appearances on his election posters and his election "parties," which mainly centered on entertainment and beer, serve as illustrations. Most of his election promises, moreover, do not relate to current political affairs but are better described as random, mildly satiric suggestions. Thus, they do not reflect any particular persuasive purpose besides simply arousing laughter. Additionally, Haugaard's candidacy was motivated by his ambition to become famous. Running for

⁵⁵ The "world press" should in this context not be taken literally as referring to reporters from all over the world. Rather, it should be understood as a colloquial expression with which Haugaard means to say that numerous reporters showed up.

election was merely one out of many attempts he made at becoming a celebrity, thereby implying that his candidacy in of itself was not of special importance.

Relative to The Best Party, Gnarr notes in his autobiography that he upon his victory realized, “how shockingly little I understood about the job. *I’d concocted the whole thing out of pure fun*. I wanted to pull a few stunts and meet a few cool people. But what I had set in motion here was definitely several sizes too big for me” (2014, 80-81, my emphasis). Thus, creating fun and joy is central to Gnarr’s purpose with The Best Party. When asked by the media about the political changes he planned for the citizens of Reykjavík, his answer implies the same: “I hope they will smile more. And laugh a lot” (Pendakis 2013).

The Best Party’s intentions and purpose with the election campaign, moreover, were obscured by Gnarr’s use of unstable irony and of techniques characteristic of Surrealism. Through his sudden shifts of persona, he exercised what might be called consciously ineffective argumentation. Simply ‘shaking things up,’ having some fun, and laughing was fundamental to The Best Party—more so than persuading anyone of anything in particular. The fact that Gnarr refers to The Best Party as “a surprise party” (Rentoul 2014), as opposed to an actual political party, also supports this understanding.

All in all, it is not surprising per se that these comedians primarily attempt to make people laugh and have fun. It *is*, however, surprising that such attempts result in election victories.

Central to the comedians’ humorous campaigns is also, of course, that they raise laughter and have fun by taking up and distorting a variety of well-known election genres. In Haugaard’s case, the most prominent genres were the election promise and slogan, the election event or meeting, and the election poster. In Gnarr’s case, digital genres and platforms as well as the election promise, the political ad, and party program were among the most prevalent. As discussed in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, the overall social action of an election campaign is to win votes and thus the election. Conventionally, the genre sets embodied in an election campaign are employed to fulfill this shared social purpose. However, the case studies uncovered that the comedians employed these genres to accomplish other functions. Besides entertaining and raising laughter, the comedians also perform functions of political humor—a point to which I will return.

Since the comedians do not use humor for the generic purpose of an election campaign, the case studies reveal a mismatch. In the context of an election campaign, the

use of humor as a rhetorical means generally is assumed to help accomplish the social action of the genre, namely winning the election. Humor, in this perception, is not simply employed for the sake of raising laughter as the comedians do, among other things. As Caesar phrases it in Cicero's dialogue: "we people [orators] speak with good reason, not just to be thought funny, but to gain some benefit, while those others [buffoons] are jesting from morning to night, and without any reason at all" (Cicero 1942, Book II, pt. 247). Raising laughter is useful, but must serve a function. Haugaard and Gnarr *are* comedians, however, and they make a point of raising laughter for the sake of laughter itself, or to enjoy themselves.

Moreover, the comedians also deviate from rhetorical recommendations for use of humor, as they do not necessarily apply restraint nor observe the rules of decorum. For example, Haugaard breached decorum through his buffoonish appearances and by including the indecent image of his penis on one election poster. The Best Party's logo with the extended thumb and the sexist ad (of the woman showing cleavage) on the campaign website also serve as examples of such violations. Applying rhetorical theory to the cases thus reveals discrepancies between what is generally perceived to achieve persuasive success and what the comedians actually do.

Thus: Although the cases of Haugaard and Gnarr invite an analysis of how they won their elections through use of humor, one must bear in mind that the comedians did not employ humor to win their elections. Nevertheless, the analyses show that humor plays a significant role in the campaigns leading to their victories. Therefore, in a sense, humor *is* the means that 'gets' the comedians elected. Even though humor is not utilized for the purposes expected of the genre or utilized in a way that generally is thought to achieve rhetorical success, the case studies nevertheless reveal insights into how humor may be used strategically in election campaigns.

The case studies moreover confirm that the comedians are, in fact, anomalies. The comedians do not behave the way we expect them to, or use humor the way we expect, and the result, therefore, is not the result we would expect either. Neither did the comedians.

The extraordinary nature of these cases is also evident, if we apply Jerry Palmer's chapter: "Parody and Decorum: Permission to Mock" (2005), in which he discusses the limits of modern parody. Palmer observes that when parody becomes more than simply aesthetic,

but critically mocks with the intention of subverting shared norms or symbols, it will be judged on ethical grounds and therefore it may be judged as inappropriate, i.e., as breaching decorum. Such a judgment relies on “the degree of consensus about the undesirability of the parody,” and can result in actual restrictions and consequences such as the prosecution of the parodist for his or her experienced offensiveness (94). In other words, “the permission to mock may well be withdrawn,” as Palmer notes, that is, subversive parody that destabilizes meaning may not actually be permitted (ibid, 93). He writes,

the wide permission for aesthetic parody, in combination with real restriction on parody which breaches widely and deeply felt limits of decorum, suggests that any destabilization of meaning is restricted to the aesthetic realm, or at least to purely individual response: it is for that reason that there is a visible limit around permissible parody, which excludes parody that really does threaten to destabilize publicly important meaning. (ibid, 95)

Moreover, as Palmer points out, the parodic mockery that took place during the carnival according to Mikhail Bakhtin’s widely cited carnival theory was only possible exactly because the established authority permitted it. Carnival life and official life coexisted, and as such the parodic mockeries of carnival life did not threaten to subvert the official life (ibid, 92). Therefore, generally speaking, parody is permitted when it is not subversive, i.e., when it does not challenge authority or the opinion held by the majority.

By contrast, the comedians’ elections are, in fact, examples of subversive parodies, as their victories reflect a destabilization of publicly important meaning. This point is best illustrated with Gnarr’s case: At first, The Best Party was not paid much attention, nor predicted a future by the media or political figures. At this point, the parody was considered purely aesthetic. But as The Best Party rose in the polls and eventually came to lead them, the parody became a challenge to authority—and authority started reacting with hostility as one reporter in the documentary describes the atmosphere at the time (Úlfarsson 2010). The Best Party nevertheless won the election, thereby transgressing the limits of permissible parody. The parody not only disrupted, but also subverted social order, as the election of The Best Party entailed that the parodist took over and became the highest authority in the city.

Applying Palmer's chapter thus reveals another discrepancy between theory and practice. It highlights how unusual these elections were because the comedians, in a sense, should not have been 'allowed' or able to do what they did. So how can we explain their victories anyway? In short, Haugaard's victory may be seen as a result of his growing celebrity status in his years of campaigning. By the same token Gnarr's victory may be explained by extraordinary circumstances, the financial crisis, which severely damaged the public's trust in established politicians causing them to turn to an absolute election outsider. Putting it in terms of Functional Theory, the comedians simply succeeded at appearing more favorable than other candidates, that is, traditional politicians (Benoit 2007). But such explanations are, of course, too simple.

Several factors relating to the comedians' use of humor also likely affected the positive outcome of their elections, as suggested in the case studies. In short: Since the comedians deliberately sabotaged their candidacies, the support (votes) they nevertheless received from the public also depended on their abilities to entertain and release shared frustrations relative to political conduct and conventions—at least in part. Through their parodic uptakes of traditional election campaign genres, the comedians perform the social action of political humor. The voters, in turn, ascribe the comedians high ethos based on such uptakes and performances, which results in votes. By consequence, as the comedians fulfill the social function of political humor, they fulfill the social function of an election campaign as well.

In other words, when the comedians win, they perform the social functions of both genres at the same time, although these genres perform entirely different functions. The case studies thereby also illustrate how two genres extraordinarily blend and merge.

The following section expands on this aspect of the comedians' wins by comparing and discussing some of the most significant features and uptakes in their humorous campaigns that likely impacted their elections.

Comparison of case studies: factors influencing the comedians' wins

Comparing the comedians' use of humor in their campaigns reveals both similarities and differences of importance to understanding their elections. These are features associated with their 1) election promises and 2) self-representation. Before going over

these topics, one factor of significance to The Best Party's win needs mentioning, namely its use of digital media in the election campaign:

In 2010, the use of digital resources in political campaigning was still a somewhat novel phenomenon. For instance, in his 2013 handbook for the campaign manager, Tolstrup names social media "a relatively new battleground in political campaigns" (201, my translation from Danish). Moreover, several studies of U.S. campaign websites from consecutive elections in the early and mid 2000s particularly note an increase of websites using dynamic features such as audio and video clips (Gulati and Williams 2009, 58; Druckman et al. 2009, 30). The growth suggests that the use of multimedia tools afforded by the Internet in campaigns was still 'up and coming' at this point in time, and while the use of online resources for political campaigning was by no means unusual in 2010, the vast possibilities that these social networking tools afford today were still en route, it seems.

The Best Party was adept at applying such digital tools in innovative ways, it seems, and for social functions of significance in an election campaign, namely for creating attention, reaching voters, and building a community. Such use likely affected The Best Party's win positively. For example, contrary to a politician's "yawn-inducing, tedious monologue" uploaded to YouTube, Gnarr's videos were designed to "keep people guessing" in keeping with The Best Party's campaign performance strategy. The casual, unprepared nature of his videos likely made them appear more authentic—a valued characteristic in social media, as implied in this campaign consultant's advice: "Don't make social media communication sound like talking points or headlines—make them sound like you" (Shaw 2018, 85). The Best Party's political ad, "The Best Video," moreover, was effective at generating views and thus creating attention, which was likely due to its innovative combination of music, comedy, and politics. In general, as this scholar puts it, "the most edgy and imaginative videos are the ones with most success" (Panagopoulos 2009, 6).

The Best Party also succeeded at connecting various online platforms, thereby potentially developing a community among users. Its Facebook page showed that the party frequently posted links to the campaign website and YouTube. Thus, it was effective at updating users and keeping them informed. Adding to this, the Facebook page reflected the type of "casual and personal style of communication," as opposed to a formal language, which is also recommended for social media (Shaw 2018, 96).

All in all, The Best Party's online campaign illustrates an experimental, playful, and creative use of digital genres and social media platforms that was not so common at this point in time. This is not an insignificant factor of The Best Party's win, as it likely helped mobilize (younger) voters besides creating attention.

Election promises

As seen, the election promise, in particular, plays a central role in the comedians' campaigns. Both comedians present empty or absurd election promises in order to expose traditional election promises as equally empty. In Gnarr's case, Helgadóttir (The Best Party's campaign manager) expresses this point in an interview as follows: "Everybody promises everything: there is a false sense that you can tie your trust to a politician and that they will save you. We were suspicious of the genre of the political promise, its tone" (Pendakis 2013).

The attention the election promise is paid in both comedians' campaigns suggests that the political promise is an essential election genre—and has been for a long time. According to Jørgensen, political promises have come to play a key role in political rhetoric in recent years, not only in Denmark, but also in a range of democracies in Europe (Jørgensen 2015, 67). In Denmark, and likely elsewhere, this development is, at least partly, a result of so-called 'contract politics,' which Jørgensen describes as "a set list of governmental issues that the politicians promise to enforce and uphold unconditionally until the next election" (Jørgensen 2010). Put simply, the politicians make a contract with voters concerning their future actions, so voters know what to expect and demand from their politicians. This strategy has a logical ring to it: If people distrust politicians, they might come to trust them more if they have a contract with the politicians' promise in writing.

In Denmark, the then Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen launched contract politics at the general election in 2001. However, the governing strategy came with several disadvantages, as Jørgensen also points out. Roughly put, it disables political argumentation. By giving promises and guarantees in the form of a contract, politicians set the course for future actions that they cannot deviate from because of the signed contract. Therefore, when the guarantee is given what is left to debate? Additionally, such contracts leave little, if any, room for a change of opinion.

Thus, the increased focus on promises as a consequence of contract politics has proven an unhealthy or counterproductive practice for political debate. Even though politicians in recent years have moved away from this governing strategy, one may still to this day observe a vicious cycle: As a consequence of contract politics, political debate, broadly speaking, has been reduced to a “hunt for promises,” as Jørgensen phrases it (2015). More promises has resulted in more *broken* promises—so many, in fact, that the broken election promise also has become a *topos* in contemporary political rhetoric (ibid, 75). This leads to dissatisfaction among voters who repeatedly experience that politicians do not live up to their word. However, as a result of contract politics, the public likely has become “more prone to expect and demand promises from politicians” (ibid, 69).

Thus, Haugaard and SABAE were anticipatory of this development, it seems, as the political promise following their campaigns has come to gain almost crucial importance in elections. In light of this development and its consequences, the comedians’ parodic uptakes of the genre likely served an important function in their campaigns providing voters with comic relief. By making absurd campaign promises, they echo voters’ frustration with politicians who often do not live up to their promises. The Best Party’s moral code particularly exemplified this practice, since almost every rule or promise of moral conduct included an exception to the rule cancelling it altogether. Thus, these parodies expose that the political promise has lost its function and has become an empty signifier.

As such, the comedians’ election promises illustrate Meyer’s second humor function: clarification. This strategy may increase the chance of audiences recalling a speech or an argument, for instance, by including humorous sound bites or “catch phrases.” Since these are easily remembered and often well distributed in the media, the clarification function of humor is particularly useful for politicians, Meyer notes (2000, 319). The comedians’ election promises thus may be understood as humorous sound bites that contain a condensed critical message, namely that promises made by politicians have little value; they should not be trusted, and cannot be taken at face value. One of Haugaard’s election promises, in particular, illustrates this point:

On 21st of September 2016, the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR) recalled Haugaard’s election in 1994, 22 years ago, in a segment on the television news. The 40 seconds long video clip was also uploaded on DR’s Facebook page along with the following

description: “22 years ago Jacob Haugaard was elected for Parliament as an independent candidate with the *unforgettable* election promise: ‘tailwind on the bike path’” (my emphasis).⁵⁶ Most of the 63 comments posted in response to the video of Haugaard on the day after his election are positive, and eight people want him back in Parliament, to run for reelection, or more politicians like him. This suggests that even after all these years Haugaard is still a celebrated figure and enjoys a particular status in Danish cultural life.

This status is linked to one election promise in particular, which interestingly is described as “unforgettable.” Thus, it would seem that this election promise has become a sound bite of sorts that reminds the public of the absurdity of making election promises. In turn, the phrase also recalls to us the particularity of Haugaard’s case: Although he did not become the court jester in Parliament he proclaimed he would, he still managed to get elected in a highly unusual way and do what practically no other had done ever before.⁵⁷ Or have done ever since in Denmark. In other words, people still remember Haugaard because of this election promise, and people still remember the critical message encapsulated in this election promise because of Haugaard.

Self-representation

The second point of comparison between the cases relates to the comedians’ self-representation and more specifically to their creation of political personas. Haugaard and Gnarr develop personas that share several features, both visually and verbally: In his autobiography Haugaard explains that he began giving thought to his political persona after the first election in 1979: “I started to shape Jacob Haugaard, the politician, based on what people knew about politicians. I took shape of the image all people recognize from television. Well-dressed and full of empty promises” (Haugaard 1999, 16). Similarly, Gnarr describes his political persona as “a simple-minded local politician with an autocratic demeanor and completely absurd campaign promises” (Gnarr 2014, 47). Thus, both

⁵⁶ See description and video on Facebook here:

https://www.facebook.com/DRNyheder/videos/1278522518864936/?comment_id=1281420518575136 (Seen 29th of June 2018).

⁵⁷ Haugaard himself hints at this in an interview shortly before the end of his election term: “It is hard to define, but I also believe that the fact that I have been at Christiansborg will have a greater meaning now that I leave Parliament” (*Ritzaus Bureau* 1998).

comedians appear formally dressed in suit and tie when in character as political candidates, making empty and absurd election promises.

Moreover, both comedians distort their representation of a political candidate, that is, the traditional look of a politician, though in different ways. Through his specially made suit, 'Yves Sack Laurent,' which "symbolized the bank director and garbage bin all in one," Haugaard merged his "real self" and his "fictional self," the buffoon and the politician. Similarly, The Best Party's political ad represents Gnarr in his two roles: Inside the sound studio Gnarr appears 'as himself,' dressed casually with stubble and his hair in disorder, and outside the sound studio, he appears as a political candidate dressed formally in a suit and tie. Both comedians thus maintain a critical distance to their candidacies and stress that they have more in common with voters than actual politicians. This likely helped create identification with voters (Meyer 2000).

Both comedians also create a political persona, whom they describe as a "used-car dealer" (in Gnarr's case, as "an American used car salesman"). Haugaard portrays the character on his 1988 election poster posing next to a Rolls Royce in a suit, tie, and broad-brimmed hat, while smoking a cigar. The heading, "An honest man," emphasizes the irony of trusting a used-car dealer, and in the context of an election poster, a politician. The juxtaposition of politicians and used-car dealers thus implies that both are distrusted professions. The analogy entails that like a politician a used-car salesman will promise you a Rolls Royce and barely deliver four wheels. Thus, the image of a used-car dealer is in both cases invoked to profile political dishonesty.

This image also corresponds with the perceived role of the politician as a salesman of sorts in contemporary politics: As much research points out, politics increasingly has shifted to the logics of media, advertisement, and entertainment. By consequence, the style, personality, and representation of politicians has become a crucial aspect of political communication. In fact, "*politics is marketing*," as Street states, and accordingly, "representatives sell themselves to their market" (Street 2004, 441, original emphasis). By extension, politicians 'sell' promises in exchange for votes. But as the comedians' representation of a politician as a used-car dealer suggests, politicians and their promises cannot be trusted.

Thus, the comedians play or experiment with their self-representation. In doing so, they both employ techniques or strategies associated with avant-garde movements. The result of Haugaard's efforts can be seen on his election posters in the many images of him dressed up, as a woman, a marine biologist, and a father, or with glasses, sunglasses, a hat etc. Although Haugaard visually develops a political persona that is more recognizable as a parody of a politician (in a suit, hat, and tie), his attempts at creating a political persona overall were random and did not resemble a political candidate in particular. Thus, his buffoonish representations were not the result of any specific strategy employed to achieve any specific purpose. Rather, they were characterized by his adherence to Dada techniques and employed for the opposite: to obscure that there was no purpose or point at all.

Through his disguises Haugaard represents many different types of people but he does not target anyone in particular. Rather, his use of humor reflects a generally mild satiric mockery of Danish politics that few would disagree with. Thus, his representations also seem to illustrate the overall inclusive form of humor that characterized his election meetings. As mentioned, the press coverage of Haugaard was overwhelmingly positive and helped create an image of him as 'a man of the people.' Due to the folksy nature of his election events at which he served the public beer or handed out Christmas presents, Haugaard attracted a wide sector of the population. His popular appeal was connected with his generosity and presence on stage, as his concern for the weakest in the audience (children and handicapped) illustrated, for example.

Moreover, Haugaard generally represents himself as an inferior person: The overall primitive appearance of his election posters, his poses in various disguises and in compromising situations, and his pledges to fight for the right to be ugly and stupid, are all examples of how he ingratiate himself to the voters. While signaling that he is equal to them, he simultaneously debunks the authority of a politician. Adding to this, Haugaard's self-deprecatory humor also relates to the inclusive atmosphere of his election events: Through his buffoonish entertainment on stage, he signaled that no one is as much of an outsider as him—therefore anyone is 'an insider.' Haugaard thereby appealed to the particularly Danish "who-do-you-think-you-are" mentality (the law of Jante) that does not 'allow' anyone to be better than one's peers. On this account, voters likely identified with Haugaard.

Gnarr's play with his self-representation, in turn, is not associated as much with his visual representation, but rather with his performance as a political candidate. The Best Party's campaign performance strategy, 'keeping them guessing,' may illustrate Gnarr's shift of roles: Sometimes Gnarr would act as a simpleton, making deliberate mistakes and over-enthusiastic election promises; sometimes he would express himself sincerely and honestly; and sometimes he would behave in an unpredictable way, leaving interviews or give incoherent, absurd answers. This strategy thus can be characterized as calculated surrealistic maneuvers to keep the media's and public's attention by blurring the boundaries between real and unreal, sincerity and parody. Thus, it reflects a more strategic use of humor than seen in Haugaard's case.

Moreover, contrary to Haugaard, who primarily appears as an inferior person, Gnarr only sometimes acts like a simpleton. His parody also is dominated by his performance as an over-enthusiastic political candidate with megalomania promising "all kinds of everything." Adding to this, The Best Party's moral code reflected a calculating persona that formulated rules of moral conduct in such a way that permitted The Best Party to lie and cover up, if it suited the party. Gnarr thereby doubled the target of his parody: The bankers and politicians who showed no restraint in financial matters, thus giving the impression that anything was possible, and covered up their own role in allowing the crisis to escalate. Thus, a specific target motivates Gnarr's parody, which therefore reflects a more divisive form of humor than seen in Haugaard's case. The strategy of differentiation was suitable as there was a lot of anger and tension in the Icelandic society towards established politicians. Gnarr's parodic persona may have served to release some of this tension.

Another factor influencing the comedians' electoral success is the extensive publicity they managed to generate based on their unusual political personas. Gnarr's campaign performance strategy, as mentioned, was designed to increase media exposure. Moreover, according to Sigurjónsdóttir, Gnarr's "celebrity status as an actor and a stand-up comedian ensured him considerable news coverage" (2013, 99). As the case study of Haugaard, and particularly his election events, showed, he also generated a large amount of publicity. For instance, already during his first campaign in 1979, Haugaard received "a good deal of media coverage," as a reporter notes and next observes: "He is a good *show*. And the

parliamentary candidate's media strategy is straightforward: He gives the press what it wants..." (Albjerg 1979, original emphasis).

The value of show business and originality in contemporary media society, as the above quotation suggests, also corresponds with the development of political communication: The influence of entertainment culture on politics has meant that the individual performance and personality of a politician has become of increasing importance (van Zoonen 2005, 69). Since political representation takes place under different conditions today, a politician's persona also is judged by different standards: "In the contemporary entertainment-political complex, this persona should be the embodiment not only of political histories, issues, interests, and communities, but also of the ingredients of celebrity culture" (ibid, 72). Such ingredients include the charisma and personal traits of the candidate.

Comedians and celebrities like Haugaard and Gnarr thus have the kind of characteristics that generally are sought after in modern-day media society. Moreover, the comedians share several personal traits, which possibly worked in their favor too: Both are old punkers, more or less self-taught in life, and they have had a variety of jobs. The comedians were familiar with the lower end of society, and had experienced being society's outsiders. For example, Haugaard received social security benefits for many years, and Gnarr had no formal education. Neither comedian made any attempt to hide these personal facts, which may have appealed widely, since the comedians did not reflect the average, well-educated political candidate but rather an average *person*, full of flaws, and more like the rest of the population. In Haugaard's case this, too, might have contributed to the image that the media helped create of him as 'a man of the people'.

Overall, by creating these parodic political candidates, the comedians invite the public to laugh at power, and by laughing "we expose its contingency, we realize that what appeared to be fixed and oppressive is in fact the emperor's new clothes" (Critchley 2002, 11). The comedians reveal norms and conventions within politics and, more generally, in society that do not necessarily need to be so. They point to the possibility that things could be different, and that there are alternative ways of looking or acting 'like a politician.' By use of humor, as John Morreall puts it, they expose "a discrepancy between what people should

be and what they are,” and thereby may help promote critical thinking about that authority (Morreall 2005, 72).

Accordingly, it may also be that voters have supported the comedians because they based on the parodies have come to learn that some norms in politics are, in fact, harmful. In other words, the comedians may not only have echoed voters’ attitude or frustration, but also have revealed new aspects of politics that voters then realize are counterproductive. As Peter Berger phrases it: “it may be a *result* of the satirist’s labors that the audience comes to understand the undesirability of what is attacked” (Berger 1997, 158, original emphasis).

In sum: By deliberately distorting the election campaign genre and creating political personas that undermined established politicians, the comedians performed the social action of political humor. Based on their ability to create comic relief and give voice to voters’ frustration, the comedians proved themselves competent rhetors and thus paradoxically were ascribed high ethos, resulting in votes (Isager 2003). Therefore, as the comedians perform the social function of political humor, they inadvertently fulfill the social function of an election campaign as well.

6. Conclusion

This dissertation set out to uncover the two cases of the comedians Jacob Haugaard and Jón Gnarr who extraordinarily won their elections based on humorous election campaigns. It explored how the comedians employed humor as a rhetorical strategy to distort the conventions and functions of an election campaign, and how they in spite of—or more likely *because* of—such violations accomplish the social action of a campaign: winning the election.

Contrary to what one might expect, the comedians did not use humor to win their elections—because they did not run election campaigns to win elections. The comedians principally used humor to entertain, have fun, and make people laugh—like comedians usually do. Accordingly, the case studies uncovered generic violations of common campaign genres, such as election posters, election events, a party program, and a political ad, suggesting that the comedians aimed to accomplish other social actions than expected of the genres.

Such violations primarily were related to the comedians' parodic uptakes of election promises and to the creation of their political personas. By making empty and absurd election promises, they exposed traditional promises as equally empty and of little value. Moreover, by representing themselves as simple-minded, inferior, over-enthusiastic, and/or calculating, the comedians debunked the authority of the traditional politician and exposed the politician as a person who simply tells voters what they want to hear and thus cannot be trusted.

Through their parodic uptakes of election campaigns, the comedians also accomplished the social action of political humor, namely to undermine the ruling powers, highlight incongruities, for example between what politicians promise and what they actually deliver, and to criticize political decisions and conduct. Moreover, the comedians created political personas with which the voters could identify: By mirroring and echoing voters' dissatisfaction with politicians and their valueless promises, the comedians may have helped to release tension. Through unifying or divisive humor strategies the comedians successfully gave voice to voters' frustrations, it seems, thereby winning their support (votes). Thus, by fulfilling the social action of political humor, the comedians unintentionally fulfill the social action of an election campaign as well.

In other words, the case studies revealed that the comedians won their elections despite the fact that they did not employ humor to fulfill the purpose of the election campaign genre. The case studies nonetheless reveal insights about how humor may be used for persuasive purposes.

The case studies also revealed that rhetorical theory on humor did not match the comedians' use of humor entirely. While ancient rhetoricians warn speakers against invoking laughter at all costs, the comedians contrarily raise laughter simply for the sake of laughter and fun, among other things. They also breached the limits of decorum. For example, like Haugaard, through buffoonish, and at times indecent, appearances on his election posters, and like Gnarr, through his shifting performances (from surreal to satiric to sincere). Such examples moreover reflect their use of avant-garde strategies often serving to obscure their purpose or intentions, thereby deliberately sabotaging their candidacies. Thus, in many respects the comedians do not follow rhetorical advice on how to use humor persuasively, as the function of their campaigns often is to provoke rather than persuading anyone of anything in particular. However, despite such violations of theory and genre the comedians were successful.

Other factors likely affected the comedians' wins as well. Both comedians managed to generate a lot of publicity due to their creation of parodic political personas and their celebrity status. For instance, In Haugaard's case, the extensive media coverage he received, especially in connection with his unusual election events, helped create an image of him as 'a man of the people.' Based on his wide popular appeal, inclusive humor, and the folksy atmosphere at his election events as well as his initiatives to give back the government support to the people (in keeping with his election promise), Haugaard became "a phenomenon." The increased influence of media, entertainment, and celebrity culture on contemporary politics therefore might have impacted the comedians' elections; since the development of political communication has meant a greater emphasis on the performance and personality of a politician, comedians like Haugaard and Gnarr are more likely to gain favor.

In Gnarr's case, the innovative use of digital media in The Best Party's campaign may also have impacted its election positively. In 2010, the use of social media platforms and other digital genres (websites, blogs) for campaigning was still a somewhat novel phenomenon. The Best Party, it seems, was skilled at making use of such digital tools for

social functions of significance to an election campaign: creating attention, mobilizing and reaching voters, and developing a community. Moreover, the financial crisis in Iceland at the time is a special circumstance that in all likelihood had bearing on The Best Party's victory as well.

That being said, the circumstances alone cannot account for the comedians' elections. At any rate, it is a special occurrence that parody in these cases became reality, and that the comedians over night became the authority that they themselves had targeted. Like Gnarr notes: "Comedy is very temporal; today's joke might be tomorrow's pressing issue" (Magnússon 2010). Therefore, in the future, pay close attention to jokes because they very well may turn real.

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Summary

Mette Møller: *Running for fun, elected for real. A genre based analysis of two comedians' humorous election campaigns*. Ph.D. dissertation submitted 22nd of July 2018 to the Department of Nordic Studies and Linguistics, Faculty of Humanities, University of Copenhagen.

This dissertation explores two cases of comedians who won political elections as a result of running primarily humorous election campaigns: Danish comedian, Jacob Haugaard, who became Member of Parliament from 1994 to 1998, and Icelandic comedian, Jón Gnarr, who became Mayor of Reykjavík from 2010 to 2014. The overall purpose of the dissertation is to uncover the comedians' election campaigns in depth so that we may come to a better understanding of how the comedians employed humor in their campaigns and how this use may have affected their wins.

Through genre based analyses of a variety of election campaign genres, such as election posters, election events, a party program, a political ad, and a campaign website, the case studies reveal generic violations, which suggest that the comedians primarily use humor for the purpose of laughter, entertainment, and criticism of established politicians or conventions in politics. Thus, not for the generic purpose of an election campaign: to win the election. Instead, they perform the social function of political humor: to point out incongruities in politics and undermine political authorities. They principally do so by distorting the election promise (making empty promises) and by creating and appearing as political personas that are simple-minded, incompetent, and/or calculating.

Although the comedians deliberately sabotage their candidacies, voters nevertheless supported them. This suggests that the comedians succeeded at mirroring the opinions and values of voters, thereby releasing shared frustrations relative to political conduct and conventions. By accomplishing the social action of political humor, the comedians in effect accomplish the social action of an election campaign as well. The case studies therefore reveal insights into how humor may be employed as a rhetorical strategy—even though it is not employed for the purposes expected of an election campaign.

Resumé

Mette Møller: *Opstillet for sjov, valgt i virkeligheden. En genrebaseret analyse af to komikeres humoristiske valgkampagner*. Ph.d.-afhandling indleveret 22. juli 2018 til Institut for Nordiske Studier og Sprogvidenskab, Det Humanistiske Fakultet, Københavns Universitet.

Denne afhandling undersøger to komikeres humoristiske og succesfulde valgkampagner, nemlig den danske komiker Jacob Haugaard, der var medlem af Folketinget fra 1994 – 1998, og den islandske komiker Jón Gnarr, der var borgmester i Reykjavík fra 2010 – 2014. Formålet med afhandlingen er at afdække komikernes valgkampagner i dybden og derigennem opnå en bedre forståelse af, hvordan komikerne brugte humor i deres kampagner, og hvilken betydning det havde for deres valgsejre.

Gennem genrebaserede analyser af et bredt udvalg af valgkampagnegenrer, fx valgplakater, valgmøder, et partiprogram, en valgvideo, og en hjemmeside, blotlægger casestudierne en række genrebrud, der indikerer, at komikerne ikke sigtede mod at opnå genrens, det vil sige valgkampagnens, formål: at vinde valget. Disse genrebrud var særligt forbundet med komikernes parodiske behandlinger af valgløfter, samt deres selvskabte politiske personaer, der fremstår enfoldige, inkompetente og/eller kalkulerende. Latter, underholdning og kritik af etablerede politikere eller politiske konventioner var i stedet komikernes primære formål med deres kampagner. Komikerne opfyldte dermed den sociale handling, der knytter sig til politisk humor: at udpege uoverensstemmelser i politik og underminere politiske autoriteter.

Selvom komikerne saboterer deres kandidaturer med fuldt overlæg, opnåede de vælgerne støtte. Dette tyder på, at komikerne lykkedes med at spejle vælgerne holdninger og værdier og derigennem forløse fælles frustrationer i forhold til politisk adfærd og politiske principper. Derfor: ved at opfylde den sociale handling, der knytter sig til politisk humor, opfylder komikerne samtidig valgkampagnens sociale handling. Casestudierne bidrager på den måde med et indblik i, hvordan humor kan bruges som en retorisk strategi – også selv om komikerne ikke bruger humor til at opnå de formål, man ville forvente i en politisk valgkampagne.

Appendix A: SABAE's election posters

“Advarsel!!” (“Warning!!”) (1979)

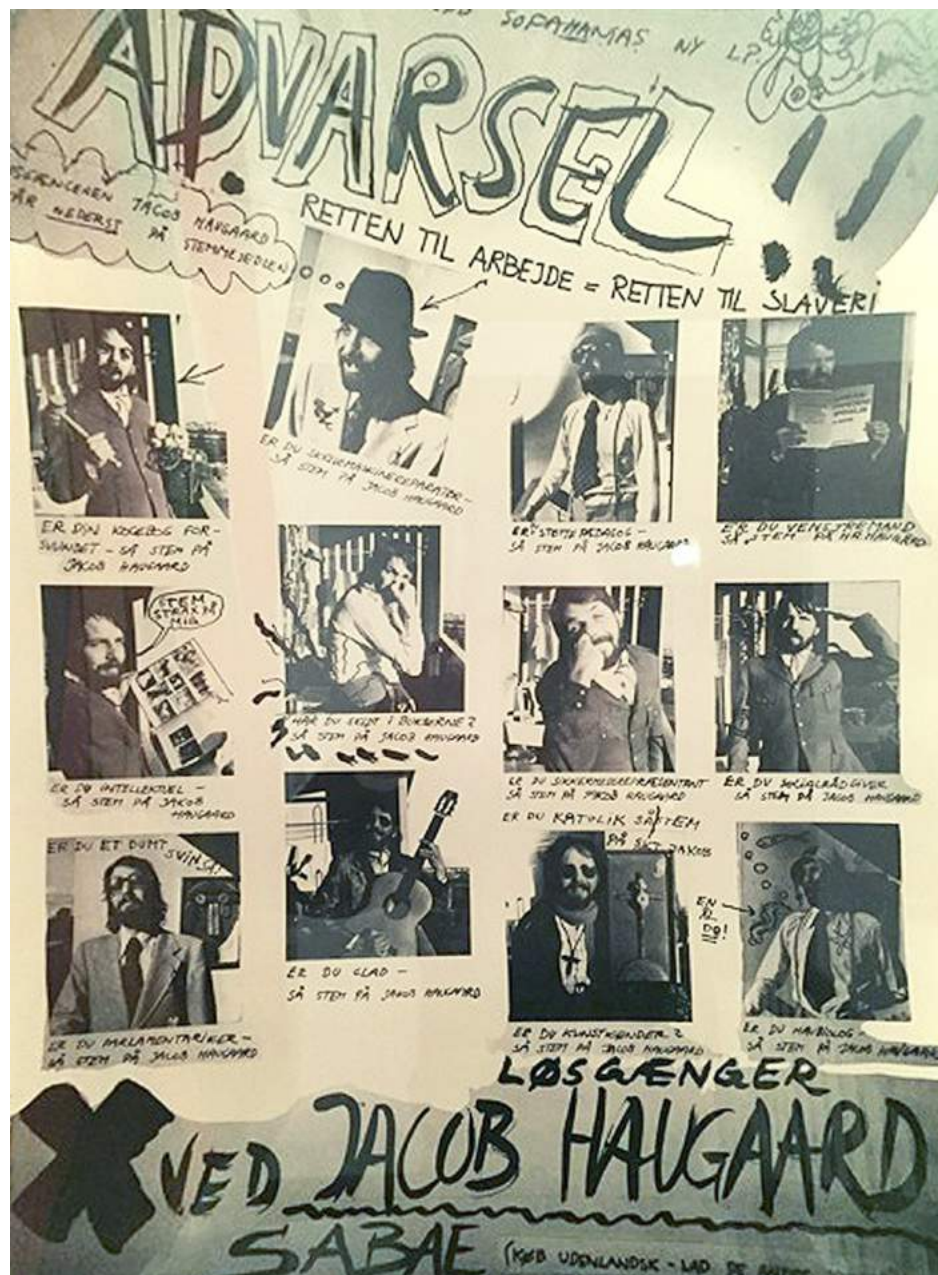


Photo by: Jacob Haugaard.

“Gør gode tider bedre...” (“Make good times better...”) (1981)



Photo by: Poul Møller.

“Gift” (“Married”) (1984)



Photo by: Poul Møller.

“Fremtiden i trygge hænder” (“The future in safe hands”) (1987)

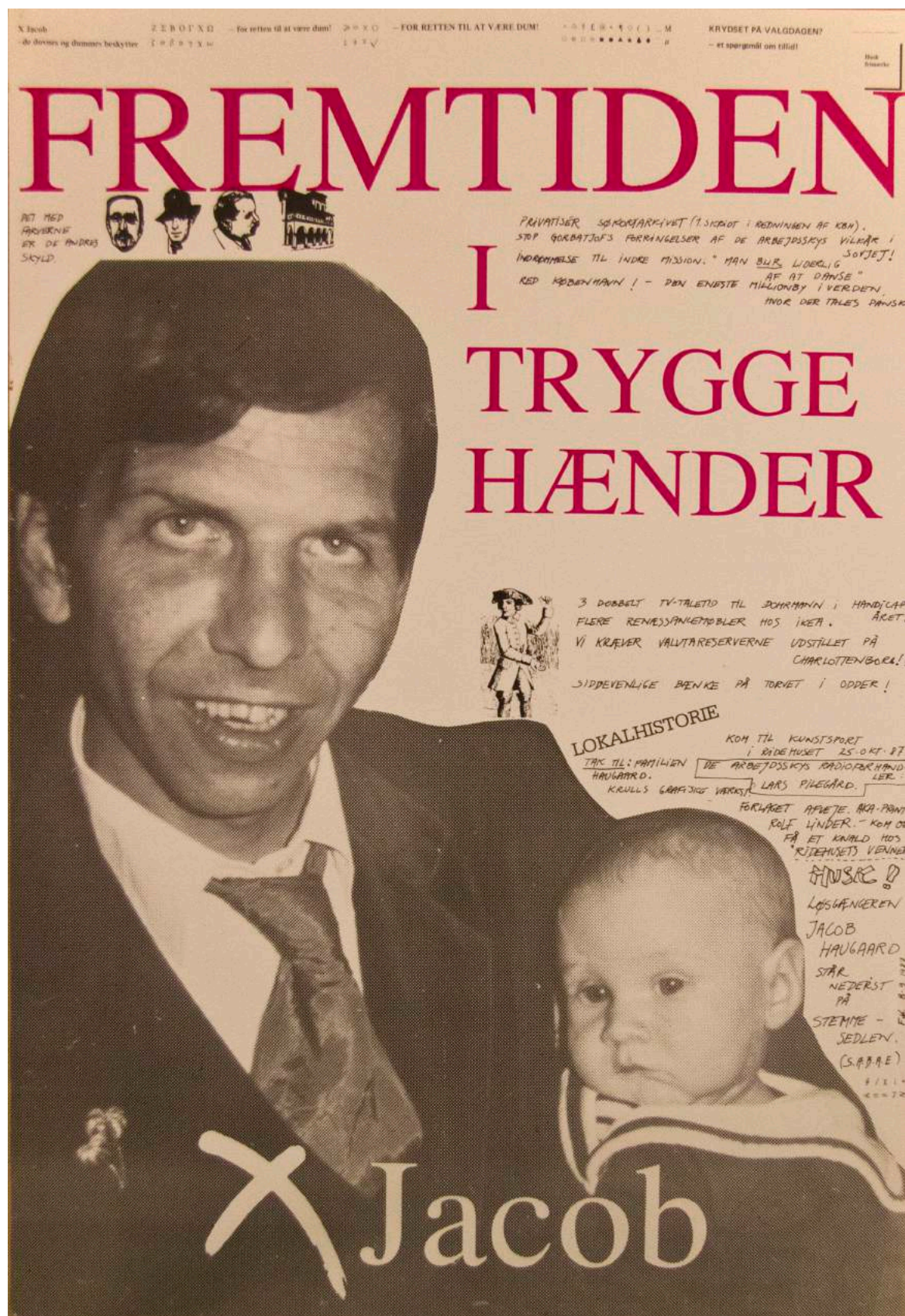


Photo by: Poul Møller.

“En ærlig mand” (“An honest man”) (1988)



Photo by: Poul Møller.

“Gør din pligt: Kræv din ret” (“Do your duty: Demand your right”) (1990)



Photo by: Poul Møller.

“Nu eller aldrig” (“Now or never”) (1994)



Photo by: Jakob Haugaard.

Appendix B: Email correspondence with Paul Smith

The following email correspondence concerns the production and distribution of SABAE's election posters.

Paul Smith 
Til: Mette Møller
Vedr.: Jacob Haugaard

14. mar. 2016 10.56
[Skjul oplysninger](#)
[Indbakke - KU mail](#)

Kære Mette,
jeg mener at huske, at vi fik trykt 1.000 expl.

Plakaten blev lavet som én collage og derefter trykt i forholdet 1:1.
Det var mig som tog alle fotografierne ude på min altan.

Vi klæbde ikke ret mange op, da de lynhurtigt blev klæbet over af især VS-plakater.
I stedet hængte vi en del op på Universitetet.
Andre blev delt ud og endelig stak Jacob og jeg en del plakater ind under butikernes glassdøre på gågaden i Århus hver lørdag efter kl. 14:00.
Så lå de dér og var beskyttet indtil butikkerne åbnede igen mandag formiddag kl. 10:00. 😊
Mvh
Paul S

Den 14. marts 2016 kl. 09.35 skrev Mette Møller <rj853@hum.ku.dk>:

Kære Paul,

Så skriver jeg til dig igen med håbet om, at du kan hjælpe med at svare på et par spørgsmål om den første valgplakat, I lavede tilbage i 1979:

1. Kan du huske, (sådan cirka) hvor mange I trykkede?
2. Hvordan blev de trykket - lavede I én collage, som blev kopieret, eller hvordan foregik det?
3. Og hvor hængte I dem op henne – fortrinsvist værtshuse, måske universitetet, rundt omkring i Århus?

Tak for din tid!

Dbh. Mette

Paul Smith
Til: Mette Møller
Vedr.: Jacob Haugaard

2. aug. 2016 14.15
[Skjul oplysninger](#)
[Indbakke - KU mail](#)

Kære Mette
Metoden var den samme hver gang, men jeg mener, at vi brugte tre forskellige bogtrykkere.
Fra og med det 3. Valg (vistnok) lå de i vinduet hos Thurs Antikvariat og så kom folk ind og fik dem. Lars Thur havde stillet en bøsse op så folk kunne give et bidrag, hvis de havde lyst. Pengene gik vistnok til bajere i butikken, da Jacob ret hurtigt havde råd til selv at betale for plakaterne.
Mange hilsner fra Halland
Paul 🙄 📧 🍷 📧 🍷 🙄

Den tirsdag den 2. august 2016 skrev Mette Møller <rj853@hum.ku.dk>:

Kære Paul,

Jeg håber, du nyder sommeren (temmelig regnfuld pt. her hvor jeg sidder, men dog lun)— og at du samtidig har tid til endnu engang at svare på et par spørgsmål angående jeres kampagner og valgplakater, der fik Haugaard valgt ind.

Sidst jeg skrev til dig, spurgte jeg til valgplakaten i 1979, hvordan den blev lavet, trykt og delt ud/hængt op. Mit spørgsmål er nu, om samme metode som i 1979 gjaldt for de øvrige seks plakater og valgkampe? Altså, var der noget, der ændrede sig i måden, I lavede plakaterne på, fik dem trykt og uddelt, fra 1979 til 1994? Eller var det i det store og hele samme arbejdsproces?

På forhånd tak (igen!)

Dbh. Mette

Appendix C: The Best Party's political program

The text, "Our goals: A new kind of political program," is included in Gnarr's autobiography (2014, 57-60).

Our party program combines the highlights of all the other parties' programs. We rely primarily on concepts that have proven themselves in the welfare states of Northern Europe. That sounds pretty good when you first hear it. Both the state-controlled planned economy with its paternalism, and the laissez-faire and market ethos of neoliberalism have failed, while societies that embody an active democracy seem to be quite resilient. In welfare states, social justice is much better developed than elsewhere, even with an extremely competitive job market. This is a good thing. We Icelanders have over the years moved increasingly away from the line followed by the Scandinavian welfare states and we must pay the bitter price. The economic crisis has hit us particularly hard and meant the crash was deeper for us than it was for most of our neighbors. Unfortunately, the mood in the country is correspondingly lousy. That's why the Best Party now really has to roll up its sleeves and be a model of reconstruction, economic stability, social justice, and a better standard of living, a torchbearer to free us from the dark ages and lead us into a better future. We want to maintain freedom of trade and an open, non-state controlled economic order.

To be honest: We don't have any party program of our own. But we still act as if we did.

The Best Party is a liberal, rock-solid party with a Scandinavian twist. We want to tackle the urgent problems that affect us all and set in motion far-reaching social reforms, operating with the necessary farsightedness and not neglecting social justice. We defend the systematic statehood and economic and cultural independence of Iceland, including its parliamentary democracy and its legal system. Citizens are being extremely cautious these days. That is understandable. For us, individual human beings are paramount, and by that we mean women as well as men. We don't think that women are naïve fools who only come out with trivial crap, but serious people who have something to say: their voices must be heard. Therefore, we want to open a women's café, where women can indulge in every

imaginable specialty coffee, in flavors such as vanilla or cinnamon, while chatting away to their heart's content and slagging off whoever and whatever they want—and every word will be recorded and carefully archived. We'll also arrange mystery tours for our grandmothers and grandfathers.

As a transparent, democratic reform party we are also planning to set up an Ideas Bank, a Sustainability Center as we shall call it, to provide citizens with a forum where they can present their ideas for the future and give them a transparent environment for discussion. The best ideas will be rewarded with a solemnly conferred special Prize, also favoring sustainability. (For example, how about training the whales and fish off the Icelandic coasts?)

In addition, we are committed to environmental protection: we want systematic recycling, a transparent use of natural resources, electric cars, and less pollution of the air and the environment, all on the basis of equality and equal authority—in line with the values of our party. We do not smoke and we do not drink alcohol. We will turn up at meetings and gatherings and, whenever possible, be in a good mood—we will also be thoughtful, take responsibility, and make decisions.

We want a new society—the best society that ever existed!

Appendix D: The Best Party's moral code

The text, "Our moral code," is included in Gnarr's autobiography (2014, 93-96).

The following "rules of moral behavior" apply to city officials and fellow workers in the Best Party, as well as all those who represent us in committees and panels. They also apply to individuals who represent the party in public, in the media, on the Internet, or using other, similar technologies, including those that have yet to be invented. With their signatures, all party members agree to these rules and are committed to them. Any violator of the rules incurs criminal penalties and will be prosecuted. Only in this way can the conscientious observance of the rules be achieved.

Anyone who is suspected of violating the rules must temporarily relinquish office while relevant officials investigate the matter. If the suspicion is confirmed, the person in question will immediately be suspended from party membership and must surrender his or her party card as well as all articles that bear the logo of The Best Party, such as T-shirts, buttons, and pens. Also, all relevant information, photos, and text materials will be deleted from the archives of the Best Party.

Finally, the expelled member must make a personal apology by asking for the forgiveness of party members in writing, thus showing remorse and expressing the desire for reparation. This apology should include an expression of regret at causing damage to our party and its image, as well as the hope that the voters will not condemn the party as a whole, but recognize the violation as the mistake of one individual. Finally, the document is to end with some warm words about the party and its wonderful members, and then be published in easily accessible places in the main analog and digital media.

1) Independence. We are autonomous and independent and do not take any sponsorship money either from wealthy individuals or from large companies. If anyone should contact us with that intention in mind and offer us financial support, our answer in each case must be: *The acceptance of sponsorship from commercial companies violates Article 1 in our moral code!* However, it is not excluded that we may declare this point to be void where necessary, or at least rethink it and change its wording.

2) Honesty. We expressly decline to tell a lie. Should this nevertheless occur, we will admit it without hesitation. If we are caught telling a lie, we ask for forgiveness and promise never to do it again.

3) Personal hygiene. We are always freshly washed and properly dressed. When we shower or bathe, we follow the guidelines of the Reykjavík Municipal Swimming Pool Company and clean our feet, armpits, and genitals in particular with the greatest care.

4) Helpfulness. Helpfulness is the actual core of these rules. We see ourselves as providing a service and are always willing to help—and this is part of the image of our party. When, for example, we come across some old granny who can't get by on her own, we are ready to help straightaway. We do not fail to ask a friend to record our helpfulness in a photo, which we can then later publish in the media or online.

5) Cover-ups. Keeping silent and covering things up are the archenemies of democracy. Therefore, we make no use of these practices, at most exceptionally and then only in self-defense. With us, everything gets said—except when it damages the reputation of the party.

6) Confidentiality. We treat everything that is said and done within the party in strict confidence and broadcast none of it outside—unless it is irresistibly funny, or especially beneficial to the reputation of the party and its leader.

7) Good mood. We are always happy and cheerful and always have a smile on our lips. We endeavor to spread a good mood and not to show our inner selves to the outside world. Always remember that we are the best! If others are listening in, we become particularly lively in our discussions of our party, its image, and how much fun we are having. And we try to prove the point as convincingly as possible by laughing.

8) Respect. We show everyone respect. If we have no respect for someone, then we act as if we did. If someone tells us that we suck, we assure him what a great guy he is. We do not

discriminate, not even the dumbest moron. We allow ourselves to disrespect people only when we are talking *about* them, not *with* them. This alone is the ultimate proof of true respect.

9) Honesty. We also always treat others sincerely and honestly, and expect the same from them. We never lie—unless we are forced to do so.

10) Cooperation. With us, everything supports everyone else. We are a unit, not a random collection. If one of us publicly comes out with some piece of nonsense, we are loyal and say we share this opinion, even if that's not true. In this way we strengthen cohesion and team spirit with the party—and thus our image and popularity.

Appendix E: The Best Party's party platform

The text, "We are better than all the others," is included in Gnarr's autobiography (2014, 73-75).

1) Protection and support for Icelandic households

Families are the core of our society and are our greatest asset. The state has a duty to meet the needs of households and to campaign for the protection of families in all circumstances. Because they deserve only the best.

2) Benefits for vulnerable members of society

These people need our help and support. That's why we offer free use of the city's buses and free entry to all swimming pools, because everyone, even the poor or otherwise disadvantaged, should have the opportunity to move in comfort throughout our city after a nice clean shower.

3) An end to corruption!

We promise to fight all kinds of corruption—by indulging in it publicly and in full view of everyone.

4) Create equal rights

We all deserve only the best, no matter who we are or where we come from. We will ensure that everyone gets the best, and do our best for every individual. After all, we all play on the same team—the best!

5) More transparency!

We think it's important that politicians always put their cards on the table so that the citizens know what's going on. We promise to implement that concretely in our party as well.

6) Active democracy

Democracy is great, and active democracy even better. Therefore, we are committed to it.

7) Debt relief for everyone!

On this point we will simply let the people decide—because the people themselves always know best what's good for them.

8) City buses: pupils, students, and the disadvantaged ride free!

We can promise more cost exemptions than any other party—because we won't actually try to keep our promises! So we could promise all kinds of things, no matter what, from free plane tickets for women to free cars for the rural population.

9) Free dental treatment for children and the disadvantaged

This is a service that, so far, doesn't exist—so we'll promise it along with the rest.

10) Free entrance to the swimming pool for all, free towels included!

Probably nobody can resist this offer—it's an election promise of which we are very proud.

11) The banking crash: those responsible are now being asked to pay

We think this too is only right.

12) Absolute gender equality

We promise absolute gender equality, because it is the best for everyone.

13) We also take women and the elderly seriously

Women and the elderly are in fact rarely given a proper hearing. Everyone seems to agree that these people have nothing substantial to say. We will change that.

Appendix F: The Best Party: Transcript of song lyrics

The translation of the song lyrics is based on "The Best Video." It can be found on YouTube here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xxBW4mPzv6E>.

We want a city that is cuddly, clean, and cool
And topnotch stuff as a general rule
Stop the usual bluffs
Doing better isn't all that tough

Fountains, wild animals, and electric trains
[Whispers] Best...Best...Best...
No more concrete and steel messing up our brains
Send it all back
Let the imbeciles pack

[Chorus]
We are the best
The bestest of parties
Best for Reykjavík
Best city of every week
Things have gone sour
We've come to the clean-out hour
The message is plain
We've come to the clean-out hour

Gimme a B, gimme an E, gimme a S, gimme a T
[Whispers] Best...Best...Best...
Tell the squatters in charge that it is time to leave
The blathering loons should be given a home in the city zoo

[Chorus]

We are the best
The bestest of parties
Best for Reykjavík
Best city of every week
Things have gone sour
We've come to the clean-out hour
Hey! The message is plain
It's time for a major change

All by yourself on Election Day
The ballot looking lifeless and a little gray
You have to choose, it's all such a mess
Vote for us, we're the Best

[Gnarr's speech]

Fellow citizens
The time has come for everyone in Reykjavík to look inside their hearts
To discuss with their family and friends:
Do I want a bright future with the Best Party?
Or do I want Reykjavík destroyed?

Free towels in all swimming pools
A polar bear for the Reykjavík zoo
All kinds of things for the unfortunate
Disneyland in the Vatsnamyrí area
A drug-free parliament by 2020
Sustainable transparency
Away with Bj**i Ben and in with Einar Ben
Tollbooths on the border with Seltjarnarnes [a municipality next to Reykjavík]
Do away with all the debt
Free access to Hljómskálagardurinn [a city center park]
Economize: we only need one Santa

And...and we will not accept the mediocre
Because we want the Best!